

Gothic Shadowplays

**The Evolution of Gothic Film and Its Visual Aesthetic
from the Gothic Novel to the Cinema of
Jacques Tourneur, Roger Corman, and Tim Burton**

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*To Ferdinand, my family,
and my American family*

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1. Introduction: Towards a Definition of “Gothic Film”

It's a trap, this matter of definition.

(Stephen King, *Danse Macabre*)

[Some] elements at least of the basic, or classic, Gothic ingredients need to be present for the term “Gothic” to remain justifiable.

(Neil Cornwell, “European Gothic”)

It all begins with a Gothic mansion. When a little girl and her parents move into a new home in a strange neighborhood, which is somewhat secluded from the rest of the world, mysterious events begin to take place. Bored because her parents never have time for her, the little girl begins to explore the old house and one day stumbles across a hidden door. Ignoring all warnings, she unlocks it and crawls through a secret passageway into what turns out to be a parallel world; an alternative, colorful and visually excessive version of her own dull and gloomy home life. There, she also meets her Other Parents; doppelgangers of her mother and father that are so friendly and caring that she does not mind that they have buttons for eyes. Unsurprisingly, the girl feels increasingly drawn to this ideal-seeming world, in which everything is beyond her wildest dreams. Thus, she also ignores further warnings. Before long, however, things begin to change into a nightmare: when her Other Mother offers her to stay in the Other World forever, on the condition that she have buttons sewn into her eyes, the girl suddenly realizes that something is terribly wrong. Horrified, she tries to return to her old home, for which the angry Other Mother punishes her by locking her behind a mirror. Here, she meets three ghost children who once had their eyes replaced by buttons and lost their souls to the Other Mother. With the help of a friend, the girl manages to escape back to her old world, only to find that her real parents have been kidnapped by the Other Mother. Seeing no alternative, the girl crawls through the passageway once more. Eventually, by means of a clever trick, she manages to rescue her parents, save the three ghost children, and return to her old home to live happily ever after with her now more attentive parents.

The story is of course that of *Coraline*, the titular character of Henry Selick's 2009 stop-motion 3-D fantasy film of the same name. As is immediately obvious, *Coraline* is a Gothic film: the sublime Gothic landscape, that is, the gloomy old mansion located at the edge of a dark forest shrouded in fog; complete with a secret passageway that blurs the boundaries between two uncannily doubled realms – familiar, yet unfamiliar, one good, one evil and rife with terror; the mysterious and increasingly sinister events that take place,

involving the appearance of ghosts linked to the past; the malicious scheming of a monstrous *Doppelgänger*; and the prevailing ominous atmosphere that keeps the viewers in suspense by repeatedly evoking a strong sense of foreboding are just some of the elements that are commonly instantly recognized as Gothic. But why is this so? Where does this notion of the Gothic come from? And what exactly is a Gothic film? This thesis sets out to provide answers to these questions with the objective of providing a clear idea of the Gothic film.

A look at movie databases as well as the ever increasing number of both academic and non-academic publications on so-called Gothic horror films makes one thing quite clear: “Gothic” seems to be a commonly used and widely accepted label for films. Considering this matter-of-course and by now almost inflationary use of the notion among cinephiles and film scholars alike, it is all the more surprising that there is in fact no established definition of “Gothic film” or “Gothic cinema” – let alone of “Gothic film” as a cinematic genre. In her groundbreaking essay (with the obviously carefully chosen title) “The Gothic on Screen,” Misha Kavka has also remarked just how surprising it actually is, “in view of the generic force of the term *Gothic*, that there is no established genre called *Gothic cinema* or *Gothic film*. There are Gothic images and Gothic plots and Gothic characters and even Gothic styles within film, all useful to describe bits and pieces of films that usually fall into the broader category of *horror*,” she argues, “but there is no delimited or demonstrable genre specific to film called the Gothic” (209).

When one compares existing attempts to define Gothic film – and most writings do not even bother to provide any kind of definition, but just use the term – it soon becomes apparent that, with the exception of a small number of well-conceived approaches,¹ the majority of these definitions are deficient and unsatisfactory. One common view, for example, is that Gothic films are simply movies which follow the conventions of Gothic literature. As we will see, however, although at a first glance such a definition might seem quite reasonable, on closer examination, it soon turns out to be much too vague and therefore insufficient. Another deplorable fact is that in most writings about Gothic cinema the terms “Gothic” and “horror” are used synonymously and no distinction at all is made; in *The Complete Film Dictionary*, for example, Ira Konigsberg even defines Gothic as nothing but an “elegant term for a horror film” (166). To simply equate Gothic and horror, however, is inadequate and,

¹ Besides Kavka’s elaborate treatise, Heidi Kaye (in “Gothic Film”), David Pirie (in *A New Heritage of Horror*, 2008, for instance) and Peter Hutchings (for example, in *The Horror Film*, 2004) have also discussed (the difficulty of defining) the Gothic on screen in greater detail and touched upon the distinction between the Gothic and the horror film; however, without actually getting to the heart of what constitutes “Gothic film.”

from a Gothic point of view, does injustice to the former. Although both notions are without doubt linked in various respects, they do not at all denote one and the same thing. “Horror” has evolved into a term that encompasses a multitude of related cinematic forms. As Pirie has pointed out, “it has come to be understood by both public and the film industry as a distinct cinematic designation which, unlike say ‘fantastique’, remains sufficiently broad to cover all the various aspects of the field, whether supernatural, psychological, historical, mythical or scientific” (*A New Heritage of Horror*, xiv-xv). In other words, “horror” has become something of an umbrella term, frequently also including Gothic films. Yet, while many horror films (characterized first and foremost by shocking sights) are indeed Gothic or at least avail themselves of Gothic ingredients, this is by no means true for all of them. By the same token, Gothic motion pictures, which often feature horror elements, are not simply horror films or a subcategory of the horror film, as we shall see. (*Coraline*, for example, has a distinct Gothic quality, but it is not a horror film in the conventional sense.) It is thus important to differentiate between the two.

The questions thus remain: what is “Gothic film?” How is a film recognized as Gothic? And why has “Gothic film” never been uniquely defined as a filmic genre?

Taking her own surprise at the lack of a definition of Gothic film as a point of departure, Kavka has made an interesting claim. In her view, “if it is surprising that there is no such thing as Gothic cinema, that is because we perfectly well know the Gothic when we see it” (209). As simple as this may sound, there is a truth to it that deserves, or even demands, closer attention and inspection. For one thing, one can deduce from Kavka’s statement that Gothic cinema must be – and in fact is, as I will argue – based on a particular look, a visual appearance, which allows the viewer to instantly recognize a Gothic film as such. I will call this the Gothic visual aesthetic. For another thing, knowing the Gothic on screen when one sees it, that is, being familiar, first and foremost, with its fundamental visual aesthetic, implies that one must already have a certain knowledge or at least an idea or understanding of the Gothic, however vague it may be. But where does this knowledge or notion come from? Part I of this thesis looks into both of these matters. It investigates and throws into relief the Gothic’s visual aesthetic and shows how the popular (Gothic) imagination has been shaped by tracing the evolution of Gothic film from the Gothic novel to Gothic cinema. At the same time, it is demonstrated that and analyzed why, from the outset, the Gothic and the visual media, especially the film medium, have shared a particular perpetual affinity.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the origins of Gothic visual culture. It begins by taking a look at the genesis of the Gothic novel in the late eighteenth century and the extremely visibility-focused context within which it emerged (see chapter 2.1.). After all, the Gothic novel, which was per se of an extraordinary visual character, established the Gothic's basic visual aesthetic; that is, all subsequent Gothic works have to some extent relied on this aesthetic in which they have their roots. As already mentioned, it all begins with a Gothic mansion, and this is not only true for the story of Coraline: in 1764, *The Castle of Otranto* by British writer Horace Walpole was published, whose own mansion Strawberry Hill served as both inspiration and setting (if under a different name) for the novel. Commonly recognized as the first Gothic novel, Walpole's work not only inaugurated a new and instantly popular literary form, but also spawned a great deal of texts that followed in the same mode. As a new type of – highly pictorial – fiction that was meant to stimulate the imagination, or aimed at “[rousing] the reader's imaginative sympathies,” as Hume put it (282), and thus reflected and catered to anti-Enlightenment sentiments, the Gothic novel caught the spirit of its time. The works of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew “Monk” Lewis, two of the most successful English Gothic novelists of the late eighteenth century, are of particular importance in that they not only expanded the list of typical components, but also advanced the Gothic novel's acceptance and popularity considerably (Lewis's then-scandalous novel *The Monk* probably being conducive mostly to the latter). Only two years after the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which became one of the most popular and influential Gothic works of all time, Charles Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) was published, which is generally regarded as marking the end of this first wave of Gothic fiction, that is, the “period in which the key [and thus defining] Gothic texts were produced” (Botting, *Gothic*, 15).

This first wave of Gothic texts established certain characteristics and a particular visual imagery that have since persisted and been strongly associated with the Gothic and its aesthetic. Besides stock characters such as hero and heroine, the corrupt villain, and the monstrous Other, these include, for example, certain sinister settings; such as gloomy, often isolated castles and abbeys (usually imbued with a strong sense of the past), complete with subterranean vaults and labyrinthine, secret passageways, or dark forests (often haunted or the dwelling place of outlaws). Frequently shrouded in fog that produces obscurity, the ominous and often claustrophobic atmosphere of these settings is amplified. Within these Gothic locales, mysterious, not uncommonly supernatural events usually take place, involving uncanny beings and (visual) phenomena, such as ghostly apparitions or eerie shadowplays, which create ambiguity. In this regard, the transgression or blurring of boundaries between

certain binary oppositions such as good versus evil, light versus dark, reality versus illusion, past versus present, living versus dead, to name but a few, plays an important role – often to address a society’s contemporary anxieties and concerns (for example, social, class, or moral issues, gender roles, or scientific or technological innovations).

Significantly, the first generation of Gothic literature spawned (and continues to spawn) new Gothic works, including such groundbreaking and (especially with regard to Gothic cinema) highly influential Victorian “decadent” Gothic texts as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), a story about man’s dual nature, uniting man and the beast in one and the same person and thus the quintessential *Doppelgänger* story; *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) by Oscar Wilde, which deals with deceptive appearances; or Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), which added the vampire to the Gothic cast. The new Gothic works that emerged generally recycled first-wave Gothic conventions and at the same time often added new components, thereby expanding the Gothic repertoire. Unsurprisingly, the Gothic novel became and remained a popular literary mode in other countries as well. In the United States, for instance, it was adopted by such famous writers as Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, or Edgar Allan Poe, whose narratives about the abyss of the human psyche had a deep impact on future Gothic texts. By adapting the Gothic to their native country’s conditions (for example, by dealing with wilderness paranoia or issues connected to the Puritan legacy), among other things, they actually created a new form of Gothic fiction: the American Gothic (see chapter 2.4.1.).

In part because of its visual character, the Gothic soon began (and has continued) to inspire different visual media (which, in turn, frequently inspired the literary Gothic), each of which then added its own media-specific elements to the visualization of the Gothic, frequently with a lasting effect. The phantasmagoria (see chapter 2.2.), for example, in a way the precursor to Gothic film in that it also plunged audiences in darkness and entertained them with uncanny projections, featured typical Gothic characters, such as ghosts or demonic figures, and not only employed fog, but also highly effective, eerie and illusory shadowplays to create a sinister atmosphere. Virtually predestined for application by film as a visual medium par excellence, the Gothic also soon found its way into early cinematic productions (see chapter 2.3.). Filmmakers frequently availed themselves of the Gothic because with its fantastic elements and features it allowed them to explore different cinematic techniques and innovative special effects; the new medium with its extraordinary technical possibilities (such as superimposition or montage), in turn, lent itself perfectly to stunning visualizations of the Gothic, frequently blurring the boundaries between reality and illusion. These early efforts in

fact paved the way for the special effects that would become a staple characteristic of Gothic cinema. Paul Wegener's *Der Student von Prag* (*The Student of Prague*, 1913), for example, nicely illustrates early cinema's use of astonishing special effects to visualize the Gothic: by means of double exposure, the doppelgänger of the film's protagonist was produced on screen. With regard to early Gothic film, German Expressionist film productions are of particular importance, especially Robert Wiene's *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920), a milestone of Gothic cinema, in which the psychological landscape of the protagonist was visualized by means of geometrically absurd set designs, distorted angles, and extreme plays of light and (painted) shadows, among others, which resulted in a gloomy and claustrophobic atmosphere. As a matter of fact, the German Expressionist style still continues to exert its influence on (the aesthetic of) Gothic cinema.

Early American and Hollywood Gothic cinema (see chapter 2.4.2.), initially frequently drawing on literary Gothic source materials and inspired by German Expressionist cinema, also played a crucial role in the shaping of the Gothic visual aesthetic on screen; moreover, it was in America that (sound) film in general and also the Gothic film assumed their most popular forms. The enormously successful Universal horror cycle in the 1930s, especially the two features *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* (both 1931), which brought forth two everlasting Gothic horror icons – Bela Lugosi as the vampire count and Boris Karloff as Frankenstein's monster – played a particularly significant role both in the shaping of Gothic cinema's visual aesthetic and in the shaping of the popular Gothic imagination. However, the 1930s in general gave rise to a multitude of highly influential Gothic horror pictures. Some of these films even augmented the pool of Gothic stock characters: *White Zombie* (1932) added the zombie, *The Mummy* (1932) contributed the mummy, and with *The Wolf Man* (1941), the werewolf came into the limelight. In consideration of the perpetual affinity between the Gothic and the visual media, it is particularly interesting and revealing to look at the various (phenomenological) parallels and overlaps between film and the Gothic that become apparent when juxtaposing the two; here, notions such as spectrality, shadowplay, doubles, or reanimation spring to mind. This is done in chapter 3, which not only shows that film and the Gothic seem to be a perfect match, but also that film is both a highly effective (and affective) and probably the ideal medium for the (visualization of the) Gothic.

In the course of this reciprocal and even symbiotic relationship between the (literary) Gothic and the visual media, each new form or work of Gothic visualization thus played its part in the shaping of Gothic film's exceptional aesthetic by picking up, transforming, and/or contributing certain visualization techniques, strategies, and styles; as Todorov put it, “we

must understand that a text is not only the product of a pre-existing combinatorial system ...; it is also a transformation of that system” (7). Hence, one could actually say that the Gothic evolved not only *within* but *thanks to* or *through* the visual media. By virtue of cultural memory, in this case, the unconscious collection, amalgamation, and internalization of “things Gothic,” and “cultural transfusion,” that is, the transmission of information on how the Gothic works (Skal, *Hollywood Gothic*, 4), then, a basic knowledge or idea of this Gothic visual aesthetic (and the Gothic in general) has been handed down from generation to generation. That is to say, since Gothic works, both literal and visual, have continuously availed themselves of previous Gothic texts, the Gothic imagination and visual aesthetic have been imprinted on our cultural imaginary – which is precisely why we know the Gothic when we see it.

The first part of this dissertation, then, clearly shows why it is so difficult to come up with a definition of “Gothic film”: ever since the emergence of the Gothic with the classic Gothic novel in the late eighteenth century, it has evolved across a wide range of different modes or genres (such as science fiction or (animated) fantasy, as in the case of the movie *Coraline*) and media. In the course of this evolution, it has constantly undergone significant transformations; it has mutated, so to speak, always adapting to the current social, cultural, and technological conditions (in terms of themes and elements, including figures and settings, for example).² Consequently, the Gothic no longer comprises only those conventions established by the classic Gothic novel, even though these conventions still persist, but it has come to encompass a multifariousness of forms. Thus, while the first, that is, classic Gothic novels – undeniably the cradle of the Gothic – tended to follow the same well-established formulas and could therefore be defined in congeneric terms quite easily, as has been done in numerous scholarly writings (which even frequently use the term “genre” in reference to the Gothic), this seems highly problematic with regard to post-classic Gothic forms, including Gothic film.

Trying to narrow “Gothic film” down to one fixedly defined “homogeneous generic category,” therefore, not only seems “exceptionally difficult” (Botting, *Gothic*, 14), but futile. Hence, as Alexandra Warwick has noted, “if there is any general consensus, it seems to be that Gothic is a mode rather than a genre, that it is a loose tradition and even that its defining characteristics are its mobility and continued capacity for reinvention” (6). In Botting’s view,

² Gothic works often pick up on problematic issues of their time (social or political ones, for example) and address them in or incorporate them somehow into the conflicts of their diegesis. Moreover, each Gothic film is to a greater or lesser extent influenced by the possibilities, conventions, and styles of the cinema of its time.

the Gothic, a “hybrid form,” is a mode which in fact “exceeds genre and categories” (*Gothic*, 14). In other words, the Gothic, which itself likes to blur and transgress boundaries and has a penchant for the obscure, refuses concrete and especially concise definition – which has probably always constituted part of its great appeal.

Therefore, this thesis breaks out in a new direction and suggests another approach: instead of seeking to confine the Gothic, or Gothic film, to one fixed, concise – and thus limiting – classification such as genre³ or subgenre and thus put it in chains – which, given the Gothic’s diversity, would obviously be an impossible endeavor anyway – it focuses on investigating the Gothic’s highly atmospheric visual appearance, its characteristic aesthetic, which results in its particular ambience and tone. Before I continue to explain the advantages of this new approach, it is important to note that whatever features one finds in a Gothic work (settings, characters, etc.) also help to create this exceptional aesthetic. Significantly, each Gothic film always adds its own amount of (reimagined) Gothic elements, drawing from the repertoire of (traditional) Gothic ingredients and iconography which were fed into it as the Gothic evolved, to create its particular individual character; or as Kavka has put it, to whatever is shown on the Gothic screen, “Gothic film brings a set of recognizable elements,” which “constitute the language ... of Gothic film” (210) and thus also help to recognize it. This is important because, according to Neil Cornwell, “some elements at least of the basic, or classic, Gothic ingredients need to be present for the term ‘Gothic’ to remain justifiable” (“European Gothic,” 29).

In my view, this visual aesthetic, or “stylistic schema” (Schrader 235), of Gothic film relies on a combination of certain interconnected concepts that is probably common to all Gothic works, no matter what media they have been presented in and what forms they have taken over time. Its analysis shall help to facilitate the identification of Gothic films, both retroactively and in the future, and thus form an important contribution to the field of Gothic cinema studies. More precisely, it shall allow films to be “tagged” as Gothic, a tag being a descriptive rather than a defining label that can be given to a film along with other tags (that way, a western, a musical, or a science-fiction movie, for example, could all equally be tagged as Gothic); as such, it is quite flexible and has an enriching rather than a limiting effect.⁴ My approach to Gothic film is to some extent inspired by Paul Schrader’s essay on film noir. Following Raymond Durgnat, Schrader has stated that film noir “is not a genre.” Unlike genre

³ The definition of “genres” is a difficult and highly controversial issue, which has been addressed by various film theorists, among them Robert Stam.

⁴ The use of tags, which is similar to the use of keywords in libraries, is already common practice on the internet, for example, in film databases. However, the tags one finds there never come with a definition and are thus quite vague.

films, such as the western, it “is not defined ... by conventions of setting and conflict but rather by the more subtle qualities of tone and mood”; in other words, “film noir is defined by tone rather than genre” (230). As I see it, the same also applies to Gothic film, its tone and mood being first and foremost the result of a particular atmospheric visual appearance; which is why my focus will be on this appearance rather than on Gothic elements and conflicts. It is furthermore interesting to note that, like film noir, Gothic film is also a “genre-spanning stylistic phenomenon” (“genreübergreifendes Stilphänomen,” Koebner 195). Hence, the use of a Gothic “tag,” which can principally be affixed to any kind of film, seems all the more fitting.

The concepts which, in combination, underlie the Gothic film’s aesthetic include:

- *Terror*; more precisely, the privileging of terror over horror, although both usually coexist.
- The *sublime* as an aesthetics of terror (as defined by Edmund Burke).
- The *supernatural*; or an effect of the *fantastic*, which may then resolve into the uncanny or the marvelous (as defined by Tzvetan Todorov).
- The *uncanny* (as defined by Sigmund Freud).

The Gothic novel has frequently been referred to as the literature of terror since it has always privileged terror over horror – a fact that has applied to the Gothic in general from the beginning, whatever forms it has taken, terror being one of the Gothic’s defining features; or its “principal engine,” to use an expression by Walpole. Lloyd-Smith has put it as follows: “[in] Gothic the terror of what might happen, or might be happening, is largely foregrounded over the visceral horror of the event” although “both are frequently present at once in an interplay” (Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction*, 8).⁵ As the quote indicates, terror or being terrified describes a sense of dread and anticipation in view of a potentially horrible event that has not yet occurred, keeping the reader in suspense, making his or her hair stand on edge, and causing him or her to shudder – not for nothing was the German equivalent to the Gothic novel called “shudder novel” (Schauerroman). Terror “[disturbs] by creating apprehension that something awful [is] *likely* to happen” (Worland 10). Horror or being horrified, on the other hand, refers to a feeling of shock and revulsion evoked by the actual experience of something awful and disturbing. (Horror thus frequently follows as a climax upon suspenseful moments of terror.) Accordingly, Devendra Varma has defined the difference between terror

⁵ Interestingly, in his essay “Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel,” Robert Hume has differentiated between terror-Gothic (Walpole, Radcliffe) and horror-Gothic (Lewis, Shelley, Maturin) (285). However, I would not make this distinction as Gothic works too often feature both.

and horror as “the difference between awful apprehension and sickening realization” (130); or to use Worland’s phrase, “terror makes us worry what might happen” while “horror shows us, it realizes our worst fears” (11).

One of the first to make a clear distinction between terror and horror was Ann Radcliffe, who made no secret of her preference for the former, which was also reflected in her fiction. In her now famous essay “On the Supernatural in Poetry” (1826), she wrote that “[terror] and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life,” that is, terror activates the recipient of Gothic fiction; whereas “the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them,” that is, horror renders the recipient passive (149). In her view, terror builds on obscurity, which “leaves something for the imagination to exaggerate” (150). It thus “activates the mind and the imagination” (Botting, *Gothic*, 74) as it “[requires] the audience to participate intellectually, to actively create the frightening thoughts in their individual minds” (Worland 11). Interestingly, Stephen King, probably the best-selling Gothic author of our time, has also commented on the terror-horror distinction. In his non-fiction book *Danse Macabre* (1981), which deals with the horror phenomenon in different media and its influence on popular culture, he has defined terror as a moment of suspense where one does not actually get to see anything (yet): “[it’s] what the mind sees [that is, imagines] that makes these stories quintessential tales of terror” (22); horror, by contrast, he has argued, invites a physical reaction by really showing something that is disturbing; King has also added a third, lowest level, namely revulsion, which he has compared to the gag-reflex. He has described his use of these three levels as follows: “I recognize terror as the finest emotion ... and so I will try to terrorize the reader. But if I find I cannot terrify him/her, I will try to horrify; and if I find I cannot horrify, I’ll go for the gross-out. I’m not proud” (25). Elsewhere, he has concluded: “So: terror on top, horror below it, and lowest of all, the gag reflex or revulsion” (25).

With regard to the Gothic’s privileging of terror, the sublime as an aesthetics of terror plays a crucial role. The sublime (discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.1.), a concept very much en vogue at the time of the Gothic novel’s emergence, especially as defined by the English philosopher Edmund Burke, has always constituted an essential component of the Gothic aesthetic. According to Burke, whose highly influential treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* was published in 1757, the sublime generally referred to the aesthetic quality of awe-inspiring magnitude, vastness, or grandeur as experienced when overlooking the Alps or a seemingly infinite ocean, for example; in other words, the sublime always implied a *visual* (often a visually excessive)

experience that strongly affected the beholder. Moreover, Burke claimed that the sublime connoted the *pleasurable* or *delightful* experience of terror in the face of something that excited the idea of pain or danger or was for some reason not graspable (though only if experienced from a distance), be it because it was indeterminate or obscured. The literary Gothic's copious descriptions of monstrous appearances and the Gothic's generally abundant use of darkness – “originally an idea of terror” (Burke 130) – and shadows (both often going hand in hand), for example, clearly fall into this category of the sublime.

One typical Gothic feature, which illustrates the Gothic's employment of the sublime as an aesthetics of terror particularly well, is that of (seemingly) supernatural occurrences. In Gothic texts, if it is not clear from the beginning that the supernatural is at work, there is at least a brief moment of hesitation as to whether the laws of our world still apply or not. In this regard, Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic is of particular importance. According to Todorov, the fantastic refers to the moment of hesitation that arises when one – a character within the story and the (implied) audience, who must be integrated into the fictional world and whose hesitation is “the first condition of the fantastic” (cf. 31) – is unsure whether the uncanny events one is faced with are the product of natural or supernatural causes:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, ... there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination – and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality – but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us. ... The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for ... the uncanny or the marvelous. (25)

The fantastic is thus a “dividing line between the uncanny and the marvelous” (27), and it “lasts only as long as a certain hesitation” (41). As soon as a decision is made as to whether the occurrences one has witnessed were real or imaginary, the fantastic gives way to either the marvelous – that is, “the supernatural accepted” (42) – or the uncanny – that is, the supernatural explained” (41). According to Todorov, this moment of hesitation is connected to vision: “the fantastic is a particular case of the more general category of the ‘ambiguous vision’” (33). As such, it can be linked to Burke's definition of the sublime, a visual experience, which frequently builds on indeterminacy and obscurity.

In this connection, another concept immediately springs to mind, which has also always played a crucial role for Gothic fiction from the beginning (even though it had not yet been defined as an actual concept at the time of its emergence): Sigmund Freud's uncanny

(which in his view constituted an area of aesthetics).⁶ In his now-famous essay “Das Unheimliche” (“The Uncanny,” 1919), Freud basically defined the uncanny as something that is familiar, yet strange. As something unsettling that harks back to what is well-known and familiar (cf. 231), it is “everything that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light” (qtd. in Royle, 51). Analyzing the etymology of the German word “unheimlich” (meaning eerie, sinister, or spooky), Freud explained that it forms the counterpart to “heimlich” (meaning homely and familiar, but also secret or hidden from others; for example, in the sense of being private or intimate). Whatever evokes an “intellectual insecurity” or a sense of indeterminacy, he argued, produces an uncanny effect (245) (in this regard, the uncanny can be linked to the sublime); for example, the (re-) animation of an otherwise inanimate or dead object, blurring the line between life and lifelessness or death; the figure of the *Doppelgänger*, or double (including the mirror image or the shadow), confusing the distinction between self and other; or the blurring of the boundary between reality and imagination. Other particularly illustrative examples of the uncanny, according to Freud, include: instances of inadvertent repetition or recurrence (for example, the involuntary return to the same place or coming upon the same object over and over again); the return of the repressed (that is, something that used to be familiar to one’s inner life has become strange as a result of repression and now comes to the fore again) and the return of the dead, which are two of the Gothic’s most prominent themes; live burial; a person with obviously evil intentions, aided by special forces; or madness.

The primary function of the Gothic visual aesthetic, which relies on and works via the aforementioned interconnected concepts, has always been to evoke a dark mood and a mysterious and spine-tingling atmosphere “of evil and brooding terror” (Hume 286) and to thereby produce a certain affect on the audience, evoking a powerful emotional response. This response is “the *point* of the Gothic experience” and at the same time “a source of pleasure” (cf. Crow, *American Gothic*, 1). As Maggie Kilgour has phrased it, the “main concern” of the Gothic – “a mode of sensibility” (Brooks, *The Gothic Revival*, 110-11) – has always been “to create a feeling or effect in its [audience],” for example, “by placing them in a state of thrilling suspense and uncertainty” (Kilgour 6). A Gothic setting, for example – be it a gloomy Gothic castle, a fog-shrouded forest, a dark urban streetscape, or a labyrinthine spaceship – is usually visualized in a way that conveys a sense of uncanniness (*loci suspecti*) and foreboding. Clemens Ruthner has called this “*Latenz des Ortes*” (latency of the locus), highlighting the fact that the place itself seems to be awaiting an awful or dangerous event.

⁶ For a very detailed and insightful account of the uncanny, see Nicholas Royle’s book *The Uncanny: An Introduction*.

That way, it evokes terror. In other words, most of the time, the audience has a feeling that something eerie will or is about to happen; scenes of horror play a secondary role. A setting also often conveys the feeling that it might be haunted or that some other form of a possibly supernatural occurrence is imminent, resulting in an effect of the fantastic. According to Robert Hume, “the setting exists to convey the atmosphere,” the Gothic “[using] its atmosphere for ends which are fundamentally psychological” (286); in other words, the setting is less important than the particular atmosphere it conveys, the “involvement of the [audience’s] imagination [being] central to the Gothic endeavor” (284). Since obscurity and ambiguity, which, as Burke and Freud contended, are conducive to producing a sublime or uncanny (visual) experience, darkness and shadows or shadowplays are frequently employed, which prevent the viewer from fully perceiving something or grasping the situation.

In order to demonstrate more concretely what diverse forms Gothic film and its visual aesthetic can take and have taken at different times – while nevertheless always adhering to the same combination of concepts introduced above – Part II of this thesis looks at selected examples of Gothic cinema. More precisely, chapters 4 to 6 present the Gothic works of Jacques Tourneur, Roger Corman, and Tim Burton, three very different filmmakers who (have) repeatedly turned to the Gothic for their films and played a seminal part in the development of the Gothic on screen (or rather on the American screen, one of the most important venues for the Gothic). Each chapter begins with a brief overview of the (film-) historical period within or out of which the director’s Gothic films emerged, followed by an introduction to his *modus operandi*. The two subsequent subchapters then provide detailed analyses of two Gothic films by this director. Chapter 4 begins with Tourneur and his two films *Cat People* (1942) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943); chapter 5 looks at two adaptations of short stories by American Gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe, *House of Usher* (1960) and *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), directed by Corman; and last but not least, chapter 6 deals with the Gothic work of Burton, especially his two motion pictures *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) and *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), which are reimaginings of Mary Shelley’s Gothic novel *Frankenstein* (or rather James Whale’s film adaptation thereof) and Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.” I would like to point out that for the film analyses I have deliberately chosen to do very close, *visually* analytic readings, going through the movies’ scenes chronologically, rather than approaching the films from an explicitly theoretical or philosophical standpoint, because I first and foremost wanted to illustrate how each director *visualized* the Gothic in his films.

For the discussion of Gothic film, Tourneur, Corman, and Burton are of particular interest and significance because all three (have) made important contributions to Gothic cinema, shaping it in different ways and (to a greater or lesser extent) with lasting effect.⁷ For one thing, the Gothic films of Tourneur, Corman, and Burton discussed in Part II marked some form of Gothic revival in popular film culture in their respective times. For another thing, these films employ visual techniques and strategies (skillfully exploiting the enormous possibilities of the medium) that are both deeply conventional, drawing on established Gothic modes of visualization, and innovative and unique, often amplifying the Gothic quality of the film. For example, Tourneur's films are primarily renowned for their exceptional form and heightened level of terror, which is evoked first and foremost by means of highly elaborate and suggestive shadowplays and added a new dimension to Gothic cinema. Corman, on the other hand, skillfully availed himself of widescreen formats (CinemaScope or Panavision), among other things; not to convey a sense of vastness, as otherwise customary, but to create a sublime sense of confinement instead and thereby enhance the claustrophobic and oppressive atmosphere of the (interior) settings in his visually excessive reinventions of Poean Gothic. Burton, in turn, whose Gothic sensibility actually permeates his entire *oeuvre*, frequently made use of almost monochromatic cinematography, not only as a tribute to old (Gothic) horror films, but primarily to amplify the dark and gloomy tone of his often fairy-tale-like films.

Like their Gothic predecessors, the films of Tourneur, Corman, and Burton – despite their different forms – all privilege terror over horror and build on sublime visual experiences, (seemingly) supernatural occurrences or at least effects of the fantastic, and the uncanny; and once again, this also manifests itself in the aesthetic of these films. Hence, they corroborate the validity of the aforementioned combination of concepts underlying Gothic film and its aesthetic. Together with Part I of this thesis, then, Part II shall provide a clear understanding of the Gothic film and as a result enable viewers to easily identify and tag films as Gothic.

⁷ The films of all three directors – each a visual poet in his own way – display a personal vision and an exceptional style. Although it is debatable whether one can or should speak of *auteurs* (as defined by François Truffaut or Andrew Sarris) in the cases of these three filmmakers (keeping in mind that a film is always a collaborative project, as has been noted by various critics), the notion nevertheless immediately springs to mind; that is to say, if one were to apply the *auteur theory*, these three directors would be excellent examples. According to Roger Corman's definition of an auteur, at least he and Burton fit the description: "Is a producer/director an auteur? I believe he is, if he is the one whose passion for a story brings it to the screen" (236).

2. The Origins of Gothic Visual Culture

2.1. Visual Culture in the Romantic Era and the Rise of the Gothic Novel

Fantasy abandoned by reason produces impossible monsters: united with her, she is the mother of the arts and the origin of their marvels.

(Francisco de Goya, *Los Caprichos*, Plate 43)

Another thing which is extremely productive of grandeur [and] magnificence ... is visualization (phantasia).

(Longinus, *On Sublimity*)

In 1764, a curious piece of writing was published in London, authored by one William Marshall of Gent. It appeared to be – or so its preface claimed – the English translation of a medieval manuscript that had been written some time between 1095 and 1243 by an Italian canon by the name of Onuphrio Muralto and printed in Naples in 1529. This book, entitled *The Castle of Otranto: A Story*, told the incredible story of Manfred, Lord of Otranto, a corrupt nobleman who leaves no stone unturned in his fight against the inevitable downfall that has been predicted by an ancient prophesy. One year later, in 1765, a second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* was published, this time with a new subtitle: *A Gothic Story*. The preface to the second edition revealed that both the authorial and historical origins of the first edition had in fact been forged; its contents were mere fiction. The second edition also revealed the true identity of the work's author: as is commonly known today, *The Castle of Otranto* was contrived, written, and published by no less a person than Horace Walpole (1717-1797), the spiritual father of the Gothic novel. Attempting “to blend the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern” (cf. preface to the second edition), he had published this work of fiction under a pseudonym and given it an elaborate falsified history, which evidently served to create an aura of authenticity, simply to protect his reputation. What makes this little anecdote particularly interesting and why it thus lends itself perfectly as an introduction to this chapter – besides the fact that it recounts the genesis of the first Gothic novel, of course – is that it reveals certain characteristics that have an interesting resonance with a trend that emerged in the eighteenth century; a trend that would become known as the Romantic movement and that, eventually, also laid the foundation for contemporary Gothic cinema.⁸

⁸ It is important to note that this trend constitutes only one development among the different cultural transformations and changes in attitude encompassed by the term Romanticism (as pointed out, for example, in Iain McCalman's introduction to *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*). McCalman has roughly defined

At the time, many people began to develop an increasing, often nostalgic, interest not only in the medieval past (hence the subtitle *A Gothic Story*, to indicate the setting)⁹, as reflected in the Gothic Revival,¹⁰ but also in fictions of chivalry and romance, the mysterious, and the supernatural. As Enlightenment reason and rationalism prevailed in everyday (cultural) life, many people suddenly felt the need for an emotional and speculative opposition to the functional and rational mindset of the Age of Reason (cf. Klein 52); a need to preserve a sense of the irrational, the mythical, and the mythological, which the Enlightenment – itself a reaction against the superstition of earlier times – had tried to eliminate. The rise of the Gothic novel as a “new species of romance” (cf. Walpole’s preface to the 2nd edition) that catered to this new demand, as well as to an increasingly literate middle class, has often been regarded as “a sign of the resurrection of the need for the sacred and transcendent” in an increasingly secularized modern world (Kilgour 3), which denied the supernatural and the imaginary and had no room for the fantastic. Gothic fiction, then, represented a “rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason” (3). This new literary form, which provided the reader with stories and images from another world that was inhabited by barbaric, extravagant, and monstrous characters or beings, and where the sensational and supernatural in all its diverse forms was omnipresent, thus habitually challenged Enlightenment views and reason while eagerly indulging in the excessive transgression of the bounds of reality and possibility (cf. Botting, *Gothic* 6) – often doing so by virtue of particular visual features, strategies, and techniques that emerged at the time.

Along with anti-Enlightenment sentiments, the Romantic movement also reflected an adverse attitude towards contemporary aesthetic norms and values. First and foremost, it constituted a revolt against the alleged superiority of (neo)classicism, which was the dominant aesthetic at the time. (Neo)classical ideals of order, unity, and “good taste” were thus rejected (as reflected, once again, in the rich ornamentation of Gothic Revival architecture). Like Gothic fiction, Romantic art, which also had its share in shaping the Romantic (and Gothic) imagination, became an enthusiastic proponent of this new anti-(neo)classical attitude. Many paintings were produced which diverged from the Age of Reason’s “emphasis in the arts on

the Romantic Age as “an age of self-conscious and diverse cultural revolution” (4). In Baudelaire’s view, Romanticism lay “in neither the choice of subject nor in the exact truth, but in the manner of feeling” (879).

⁹ At the time, the term “Gothic” (or “Gothick”) was simply equated with “medieval.” While until around the mid-eighteenth century it had been used as a pejorative term, it now saw a revaluation and was invested with positive meaning.

¹⁰ The Gothic Revival was an eighteenth-century architectural movement, which manifested itself, among other things, in the construction of artificial ruins or in a particular form of landscape gardening. Horace Walpole, for example, had built himself the Gothic castle of Strawberry Hill, which then also served both as an inspiration and as the setting for his novel. William Beckford’s Fonthill Abbey, with its then 260-foot tower, had also been a result of this vogue. In general, the Gothic Revival was one of the main sources of inspiration behind the emergence of the Gothic novel.

symmetry, control, aesthetic order and classical restraint” (Frank, qtd. in Barron 3). Instead, emotions were foregrounded, and an “aesthetics ... associated primarily with the sublime” was emphasized (Botting, *Gothic*, 3).

The sublime,¹¹ which became one of the key concepts for the Gothic, gained increasing importance as an aesthetic concept in the eighteenth century. Indicative of the “cult of immensity” that prevailed at the time (cf. Altick 186-187), it generally described a quality of grandeur, including ideas of (divine) infinity, power, and excess. Combining sensibility and emotions with a strong emphasis on visuality and the visual experience, the sublime foregrounded the paradoxically delightful experience of terror, as evoked by (the depiction of) awe-inspiring natural sceneries or situations. “In broad terms,” as Philip Shaw has noted, “whenever experience slips out of conventional understanding, whenever the power of an object or event is such that words fail and points of comparison disappear, *then* we resort to the feeling of the sublime” (2). In the Romantic era, it came to be viewed particularly as “something that astonishes and elevates the fancy, and gives a greatness of mind,” as Joseph Addison had put it in an essay that was published as part of a series on “The Pleasures of the Imagination” in his magazine *The Spectator* in 1712 (qtd. in Phillips x). Addison’s text would also go on to inspire one of the most influential theorists of the sublime: the English philosopher Edmund Burke.

In Burke’s seminal treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), which became a key text of its time and, in particular, for the Gothic, he provided the following general definition: “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (36). For Burke, there was thus a close connection between the sublime, that “strongest emotion,” and *terror*, which he claimed to be “the ruling principle of the sublime” (54). Linking the sublime to the faculty of *sight* – also in the figurative sense of seeing as understanding – and thus emphasizing its visual dimension, Burke further pointed out that *obscurity* (the exact opposite of the Enlightenment notion of clarity!) was particularly conducive to “[making] any thing very terrible” (54). In his view, obscurity, as something that

¹¹ The concept of the sublime can actually be traced back to ancient times, when it was used as an adjective to describe a particularly elevated and lofty rhetoric or thought. It was continuously shaped and rethought by various philosophers, such as Longinus, Burke, Kant, and Schiller, to name only some of the most influential. The great interest in the sublime in the Romantic era was most likely sparked by the French critic Nicolas Boileau, who had translated *On Sublimity*, a work attributed to the Greek philosopher Longinus, in 1674 (cf. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* 418). In England, Burke’s definition of the sublime became a key text. For a concise treatise of the sublime, see Philip Shaw’s enlightening book *The Sublime* (Routledge, 2006).

causes uncertainty (because no clear idea can be formed) or leaves one in the dark (literally or figuratively), was “*affecting* to the imagination” (55). Moreover, he was convinced that “dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those have which are more clear and determinate” (58). In other words, obscurity was a powerful means to evoke the sublime; a means that the Gothic would eagerly employ from the beginning. Yet Burke argued that the sublime could also produce *delight*. However, in order to be able to experience the sublime as delightful, a certain distance was needed because “[when] danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful” (36-37). With regard to the natural sublime, which referred to magnificence and great dimensions in nature, such as the Alps or vast landscapes, Burke contended that it produced the passion of “astonishment,” which he defined as “that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.” “In this case,” he continued, “the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it” (53). In other words, Burke implied that the natural sublime eclipsed reasoning – just what the Romantic movement was promoting.

Romantic paintings of the (natural) sublime by popular artists such as Johann Heinrich Füssli (also known as Henry Fuseli), William Blake, Caspar David Friedrich,¹² or J.W. Turner, to name but a few, thus featured awe-inspiring elements such as otherworldly, often eerie, figures; massive gothic buildings or gloomy ruins; (dead trees in) fog-shrouded landscapes and vast mountain ranges; or wild and turbulent seas or skies that convey a sense of grandeur and thereby evoke correspondingly strong emotions. These paintings, which both captured and influenced the Gothic imagination, obviously broke with the (neo)classical notions of order and taste and rather evoked impressions of disorder and agitation. In a way, then, what followed the *Enlightenment* was a deliberate return to *darkness*, both literally and figuratively: to confusion, chaos, and asymmetry. Francisco de Goya’s famous sublime painting *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* (1799) nicely reflects this new attitude at the time: when reason sleeps, when light (reason, knowledge) gives way to darkness (imagination, confusion), monsters (dreams, fantasies, fictions) appear or emerge.¹³

¹² Although Caspar David Friedrich was a German painter who had a great influence on the German Romantic tradition (cf. Tybjerg 30), I am adding him to this list because his paintings are not only excellent examples of, but they also immediately convey what constitutes the sublime. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, another German painter and architect, who also produced impressive paintings of the sublime, is also worth mentioning.

¹³ Interestingly, Goya’s painting is ambiguous: on the one hand, it can be interpreted as a warning, espousing Enlightenment ideals; on the other hand, it can also be read as an affirmation of the Romantic era’s creative process that broke with precisely these ideals.

Metaphorically speaking, then, the Romantic era put reason to sleep to awaken or let loose the monsters of the mind.

Walpole's prototypical "Gothic story" thus obviously caught the spirit of the time; not least because the "author's principal engine" had been terror (cf. Walpole's first preface, 6), "the ruling principle of the sublime" according to Burke. What is of particular importance with regard to Walpole's novel is that it not only inaugurated a new and instantly popular literary mode (especially among female readers), but it also provided the basic ingredients and *visual imagery* that would forever shape the Gothic visual aesthetic. Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* features eerily dark, gloomy, and shadowy settings complete with mysterious, (not uncommonly) supernatural events, usually involving uncanny visual phenomena, all of which combines to produce a spine-tingling atmosphere. These characteristic features are still prominent in Gothic fictions today, works that depict "the dark side, the world of cruelty, lust, perversion, and crime that ... is hidden beneath established conventions" (Edmundson 4), including Gothic cinema.

Interestingly, the Gothic, which often looked to poetry¹⁴ and painting for modes of representation (cf. Kilgour 5), developed from the beginning as a highly pictorial mode that "tended to be overtly 'visual'" (Miles, 3rd par.) or had "something peculiarly visual about" itself (Kavka 209). As Susan Wolstenholme has noted, the Gothic owed its visual character to "a particular style of suggesting emotions and actions, a style expressly visual in its reliance on gestures and pictorial effects" (6). The (initially highly controversial)¹⁵ Gothic novel – that "ur-narrative of the modern era" (Hoeveler 120)¹⁶ – was thus *inherently* visual, even to the extent that it often intended to make things "visible" to the reader by pointing out current social concerns. Its language, rich in imagery and serving as a mediator of this special kind of visuality, was geared towards stimulating the imagination and appealing to the mind's eye of its audience (much like a "cinema of the mind").¹⁷ Gothic texts, which both challenged and

¹⁴ One precursor of the Gothic was the work of the so-called Graveyard Poets, such as Edward Young or Robert Blair, which revolved around dark and melancholy themes, especially death.

¹⁵ A number of critics, Coleridge among them, regarded the Gothic novel as a "dangerous technology" that prompted readers to indulge in reveries and thus presented a threat to their morality. Moreover, the idea that it was in fact the product of someone else's (the author's) imagination that was implanted into the minds of passive readers seemed to be particularly intolerable (cf. Miles, 4th par., and Botting, 6th par.). For Coleridge's discussion of reading and imagining, see chapter three in his *Biographia Literaria*. For more information on Romantics that "disdained the rise of popular visual media" (and I would include the Gothic novel here), see Gillen D'Arcy Wood's *The Shock of the Real: Romanticism and Visual Culture, 1760-1860* (Palgrave, 2001).

¹⁶ Hoeveler points out that by this she means that the Gothic "has the potentiality and amorphousness to adapt itself to whatever cultural script is currently being enacted" (2nd par.).

¹⁷ While it is probably true for all (fictional) literary texts that they stimulate the imagination and evoke images in the mind, I contend that the Gothic has always had an exceptional potency and way to do so, as will become clearer in the course of this chapter. It also has to be kept in mind that at the time, the Gothic novel's visual character was groundbreaking.

built on the imaginative powers of their readers, were thus always aimed at evoking virtual worlds. They effectively prompted the “spectator/reader” or “reader/voyeur” (Wolstenholme 12, 6) to “see” or visualize the scenes, sceneries, and images depicted in them, making him or her an eyewitness of the events, so to speak.¹⁸ By implication, then, the literary Gothic text always involves a form of visual spectacle.¹⁹ As Misha Kavka has argued, the “fearful effect of the Gothic” actually depended on the reader’s “ability to cast certain conventionalized images from the text onto the ‘screen’ of [the] mind’s eye” (169). Towards its end, Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* provides an impressive example of such a sublime visual spectacle, evoked by verbally created visual (and auditory) effects:

A clap of thunder at that instant shook the castle to its foundations; the earth rocked, and the clank of more than mortal armour was heard behind The moment Theodore [the hero] appeared, the walls of the castle behind Manfred [the villain] were thrown down with a mighty force, and the form of Alfonso, dilated to an immense magnitude, appeared in the centre of the ruins. Behold in Theodore, the true heir of Alfonso! said the vision: and having pronounced these words, accompanied by a clap of thunder, it ascended solemnly towards heaven, where the clouds parting asunder, the form of saint Nicholas was seen; and receiving Alfonso’s shade, they were soon wrapt from mortal eyes in a blaze of glory. (98-99)

The fact that the Gothic novel was always particularly concerned with visuality and visual perception is also manifest in the seminal works by Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823), author of such novels as *A Sicilian Romance* (1790), *The Romance of the Forest* (1791), *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), and *The Italian* (1797), among others; and Matthew “Monk” Lewis (1775-1818), who besides his famous novel *The Monk* (1796) also wrote the Gothic play *The Castle Spectre* (1796). Following in Walpole’s footsteps and advancing the mode considerably, Radcliffe and Lewis, two of the most influential authors of first-wave Gothic fiction²⁰ whose immensely popular novels had a share in the mode’s heyday in the late eighteenth century, also placed a strong emphasis on the visual experience.²¹ Besides her technique of the “explained supernatural,” Radcliffe became particularly famous for her

¹⁸ Of course, strictly speaking, “seeing” and “imagining” are not the same thing. Nevertheless, the two verbs are obviously closely related, that is, they “play across the same field,” as Diderot once put it (qtd. in Thomas 1), which allows for my use here.

¹⁹ On a side note, this observation allows for a nice connection to the visual media. As the Soviet Russian director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein in his essay on “Dickens, Griffith, and Ourselves [Film Today]” once pointed out, film was clearly indebted to literature, the novel in particular. In his view, it had “contributed so much ... to the art of viewing – and,” he emphasized, “I mean *viewing*, in both the senses of this term” (144).

²⁰ I am using the term “first-wave Gothic fiction” to refer to those defining works that came into being between the 1760s and the 1820s, that “period in which the key Gothic texts were produced” (Botting, *Gothic* 15), roughly the same time span that McCalman has defined as the Romantic Age (cf. *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age*).

²¹ According to Leslie Fiedler, although Walpole’s prototypical novel gave rise to a new literary fashion in terms of its themes and symbols, it was not until the French Revolution with its terrors that the European imagination was finally ready for the Gothic novel as a new mode (cf. 126). It was with the writings of Ann Radcliffe, in particular, then, that the Gothic novel was actually established.

impressively skillful and highly elaborate pictorial descriptions (or rather mental paintings) of sublime, awe-inspiring landscapes, which stunningly revealed nature's grandeur to the reader and often reflected the emotional landscape of the (contemplating) protagonist. The following excerpt from *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, one of her most popular novels, shows this nicely:

And now, the way led to the lofty cliffs, from whence the landscape was seen extending in all its magnificence.

Emily [the heroine] could not restrain her transport as she looked over the pine forests of the mountains upon the vast plains, that ... stretched along, till their various colours melted in distance into one harmonious hue, that seemed to unite earth with heaven. Through the whole of this glorious scene the majestic Garonne wandered; descending from its source among the Pyrenées, and winding its blue waves towards the Bay of Biscay.

The ruggedness of the unfrequented road often obliged the wanderers to alight from their little carriage, but they thought themselves amply repaid for this inconvenience by the grandeur of the scenes; and, while the muleteer led his animals slowly over the broken ground, the travellers had leisure to linger amid these solitudes, and to indulge the sublime reflections, which soften, while they elevate, the heart, and fill it with the certainty of a present God! (28)

It is worth quoting another impressive passage from the same novel, where Radcliffe also presents a sublime visual experience:

Emily [the heroine] gazed with melancholy awe upon the castle [her future prison], which she understood to be Montoni's [the villain]; for, though it was now lighted up by the setting sun, the gothic greatness of its features, and its mouldering walls of dark grey stone, rendered it a gloomy and sublime object. As she gazed, the light died away on its walls, leaving a melancholy purple tint, which spread deeper and deeper, as the thin vapour crept up the mountain, while the battlements above were still tipped with splendour. From those too, the rays soon faded, and the whole edifice was invested with the solemn duskiness of evening. Silent, lonely and sublime, it seemed to stand the sovereign of the scene, and to frown defiance on all, who dared to invade its solitary reign. (226-227)

Lewis's most popular work, *The Monk*, was a scandal when it was published. Composed in only ten weeks, the novel brings together a conglomeration of conventional Gothic ingredients evidently borrowed from various Continental sources, in particular from the German *Schauer-Romantik*.²² *The Monk* stood out at the time not only because of its often salacious or shocking visual explicitness, achieved in part through Lewis's "exuberantly graphic" prose style (cf. Pirie 4), but also because it features several forms of visual media. Besides a portrait of the Madonna (which shockingly serves as pornographic material), for example, a mysterious optical device plays a particularly prominent role: a magic mirror allows Lewis's protagonist, the monk Ambrosius, to satisfy his voyeuristic desires by watching (his sister!) Antonia undress and bathe. By means of this "peephole" device, which thus becomes the projection screen of his desires, the friar is thus able to expand the

²² These conventional ingredients include, among others: Gothic castles, ruins, and ecclesiastical buildings as well as labyrinthine subterranean vaults and passageways; dark woods; rape and incest; a Wandering Jew; and a Bleeding Nun.

boundaries of his natural field of vision – which here simultaneously represents a transgression of moral boundaries and thus an additional form of excess. (It comes as no surprise, then, when at the very end of the novel Ambrosius's infernal punishment consists in his once "fiery and penetrating" eyes, the mirrors of his soul, being dug out by eagles (18, 442).) The following excerpt, which describes this scene of voyeuristic spectacle, makes clear why Lewis's novel had in fact been denounced by Coleridge for its "disturbing visuality" (Townshend, 3rd par.) and "voluptuous images" (Coleridge, qtd. in Townshend, 3rd par.):

Matilda [Ambrosius's temptress] pronounced the magic words. Immediately, a thick smoke rose from the characters traced upon the borders, and spread itself over the surface. It dispersed again gradually; A confused mixture of colours and images presented themselves to the Friar's eyes, which at length arranging themselves in their proper places, He beheld in miniature Antonia's lovely form. The scene was a small closet belonging to her apartment. She was undressing to bathe herself. The long tresses of her hair were already bound up. The amorous Monk had full opportunity to observe the voluptuous contours and admirable symmetry of her person. She threw off her last garment Though unconscious of being observed, an in-bred sense of modesty induced her to veil her charms; and She stood hesitating upon the brink, in the attitude of the Venus de Medicis. At this moment a tame Linnet flew towards her, nestled its head between her breasts, and nibbled them in wanton play Ambrosio could bear no more: His desires were worked up to phrenzy. (271)

The immediately typical graphic quality of the Gothic novel, its high degree of verbally-induced visuality and pictorialness (what Luisa Calè has called its "cinematic effects" (4)), clearly reflects the increasing general interest in visuality and (conscious, individual)²³ visual perception at the time. The Romantic era put the visual experience center stage. Thus, the fact that the Gothic – with the term itself going back to the particular *look* of (neo-)Gothic architecture! – developed into such a visual mode in the first place was obviously a direct result of the historical, cultural, economic, and scientific context within which it evolved; an era that initiated the "visual turn." It was at that time, at the threshold of modernity, that ideas of seeing and visuality, including notions of vision, the image, and the making of images, were gaining new meaning and significance in Western Europe, and the visual experience as well as visual literacy became increasingly important (cf. chapter one in Schwartz & Przyblyski). Put another way, "'the culture of visuality' became visible for the first time" (Thomas 2). In the course of these developments, seeing became dynamic and the gaze mobile; that is, the eye began to wander (cf. Hick 11, my translation, and Gunning, "The Birth of Film," 15).

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Age of Enlightenment brought with it a new scientific rationalism and knowledge came to be acquired through seeing.²⁴ Thus,

²³ It was with the Romantic era that individualism gained particular significance.

²⁴ In the eighteenth century, Newtonian science and his *Opticks* (1704) had a particularly great impact.

“looking and the gaze became central to the production of knowledge” (Evans 15). The physical eye was now considered a tool with which to grasp one’s environment and the meaning of things; it therefore became “the preeminent organ of truth” (Christ and Jordan xx). In the early nineteenth century, scientific experiments (in the natural sciences) helped to “make things visible,” so to speak; that is, they were conducive to the finding of new scientific results and a “new truth” about things. Seeing became (and replaced) believing. Mary Shelley’s Gothic novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818; the subtitle of which speaks for itself), which revolves around a young scientist who artificially creates human life, addresses (and calls into question) precisely these new developments in the human pursuit of knowledge: it presents an exaggerated horror scenario of a scientific experiment gone awry to point to the dangers of such human hubris (incidentally, note also Shelley’s emphasis on the “dull yellow” or “watery” eyes of the monster, which seems to suggest its limited ability of perception, both literally and figuratively (58)).

Quite unsurprisingly, the eye itself soon became an object of close scientific scrutiny. As a result, a great number of experiments on the physiology of the eye and the processes of vision were conducted between 1820 and 1840 (cf. Horton 3). In the course of these experiments, however, empirical science soon revealed that (and how) the eye could easily be tricked and deceived; vision could be manipulated. For the Victorians, two models of vision thus existed: on the one hand, the observer’s eye was “unreliable and subjective,” which had been shown by empirical science; on the other hand, the observer was an “active, autonomous producer of his or her own visual experience” (Horton 8). All in all, there was an increasing distrust among the Victorians toward the “workings of that imperfect instrument, the eye” (Flint xiv) and the notion of the visual as truth. It also became clear that appearances could be misleading: what one saw did not necessarily reflect the true nature of things. (This probably also explains the increasing preoccupation with “right seeing” and “right perspective,” and why these notions were suddenly so eagerly advocated in a great number of Victorian writings (cf. Horton 6)).

The knowledge of the fallibility of the eye, however, also brought with it an enormous fascination with the (abilities of the) eye in general and (the potential for manipulation of) the act of seeing as well as an increasing interest “in that which was not readily visible to the eye” (Flint xiv). The concept of the “deceivable eye” resulted in a keen interest in optical illusions: numerous types of optical gadgetry and toys were developed, enjoying immense popularity with nineteenth-century audiences. In the scope of this enormous preoccupation with the visual faculties and their manipulation, it seems only natural that the Gothic became even

more interested in obscurity, ambivalence, and delusion and the resulting oppositions between certainty and uncertainty or reality and illusion. Thus it also eagerly availed itself of the idea that vision could not be trusted and that things are not necessarily what they appear to be. This is well visible in late-eighteenth-century Gothic novels such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), which revolves around the (visibly) dual nature of man; *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) by Oscar Wilde, a story about a vain young man whose real, degenerate self is literally captured on the canvas of a painting; or Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), in which appearances, especially that of the title character, are particularly deceiving.

Parallel to and as a consequence of these overall developments, a multifarious popular visual culture began to emerge in England and Western Europe in general in the mid-eighteenth century. People were obsessed with visual spectacle and visual entertainment in all its forms (cf. Thomas 2). Due to an incipient "reorganization of vision" and a "break with classical models of vision," "a new model of the observer, embodied in aesthetic, cultural, and scientific practices," was emerging in Europe (Crary 2-3). The obvious developments in spectatorship already hinted at the development of a consumer culture in which the world was consumed visually (cf. Gunning, "The Birth of Film," 15) and spectatorship was becoming "a dominant cultural leisure-time activity" (Christ and Jordan xxvi). The growing fascination with visuality and visual entertainment yielded an ever-increasing (mass) production of visual spectacles, which continuously gave rise to new visual sensations to satisfy the public's seemingly insatiable demand for spectacular entertainment. The following chapter looks at various forms of early (techno-visual) Gothic spectacles since the mid-eighteenth century.

2.2. Phantasmagoric Specter-cles: Early Techno-visual Performances of the Gothic

Vision is never far from illusion.

(Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria*)

In the wake of the growing interest in visuality and the visual experience in the Romantic era, a multifarious popular visual culture began to emerge. At the same time that the highly visual Gothic novel was flourishing, various kinds of shows proliferated, often featuring new and innovative visual technologies, which catered to the steadily increasing market of popular visual entertainment. One such show was Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg's *Eidophusikon* (first exhibited in 1781), which also conformed to the current taste for Gothic romanticism (cf. Heard 12).²⁵ This spectacle, which consisted in a series of effectively lit moving pictures (animated tableaux) that usually represented sublime natural phenomena, anticipated not only the development of the panorama and the diorama (which, as their names suggest, were mainly concerned with the display of grand sceneries) but ultimately also that of cinema (cf. Russell 587). Originally intended for an elite audience, the *Eidophusikon* was soon made accessible to a wider, less financially strong public and thus – about a century before the emergence of cinema, which would eventually do the same – “brought the classes together” (cf. Altick 3). It is particularly interesting to note that it was allegedly a private performance de Loutherbourg staged for William Beckford that provided the writer with the visual inspiration for his Gothic novel *Vathek* (cf. Hoeveler, 5th par.)²⁶ – which points to the immediate reciprocal relationship between the Gothic and techno-visual media. Not for nothing has Miles contended that the “links between the Gothic and the rise of visual technology are at once deep and seemingly fortuitous” (4th par.).

The *laterna magica*, or magic lantern, which also inspired and found its way into a number of Gothic novels and was, in turn, itself frequently inspired by this young literary form, is probably the most important and formative technology of the time with regard to the developments of the immediate affinity between the Gothic and the visual media. As a complete projection device for the purpose of entertainment, the magic lantern can be traced back at least to the seventeenth century. The Dutch scholar Christiaan Huygens, for example, had apparently given private demonstrations featuring an elaborate animated skeleton as early as the 1650s. Athanasius Kircher, a Jesuit priest and projectionist whose influential 1671 book

²⁵ De Loutherbourg (1740-1812) was a famous and highly skilled stage designer who worked for some time at Drury Lane Theatre. His innovations in lighting effects and perspective played a seminal part in the development of the British stage.

²⁶ For a detailed account of this event, see Roger Lonsdale's introduction to *Vathek*, which includes a lengthy report by Beckford (cf. x-xii).

Ars Magna Lucis et Umbrae featured illustrations of lanterns had also experimented with magic lantern devices to create eerie illusions (cf. Heard 34ff. and Hick 115ff.). Initially, in addition to its employment for alleged supernatural practices, such as ghost-raising or prophesy-making, the magic lantern was thus also already used simply to amuse occult-enthusiastic audiences (cf. Heard 8). In any case, this optical apparatus was mainly used for spectacular projections of magical and fantastic subjects since its inception (cf. Hick 139).

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the magic lantern (which produced direct images and not reflected ones like the camera obscura (cf. Horton 6-7)) enjoyed increasingly great popularity as one of the favorite toys of both showmen and the public, which was already growing more and more familiar with this kind of technology (cf. Heard 8). It became an immensely popular instrument of story-telling magicians known as Gallant showmen. These performers usually came from foreign countries to perform their mysterious shows in public places or in private homes, often hiding the lantern for greater effect (cf. 8). Their performances featured exotic sceneries, fantastic subjects, otherworldly appearances, and monstrous figures. A particularly illustrative example not only of the use and effect of such a magic lantern show, but also of the immediate interconnection between these shows and Gothic texts, is given in a scene in Friedrich Schiller's (fragmented) German novel *Der Geisterseher* (*The Ghost-Seer*); which was published in 1787/88 and is said to have established the "Schauerroman" in Germany.²⁷ In this scene, a fraudulent illusionist who is referred to as "the Sicilian" claims that he is able to bring back the dead. With the help of a magic lantern and a cunning show, he manages to trick a group of people, including the two protagonists (the narrator and the prince), who initially believe that they are actually seeing a real ghost. Eventually, however, the Sicilian is exposed, and the protagonists force him to confess and to explain the illusion:

"But," continued he [the prince], after a long silence, "how did you produce the figure which appeared on the wall over the chimney?"

"By means of a magic lantern that was fixed in the opposite window-shutter, in which you have undoubtedly observed an opening."

"But how did it happen that not one of us perceived the lantern?" asked Lord Seymour.

"You remember, my lord, that on your re-entering the room it was darkened by a thick smoke of frankincense. I likewise took the precaution to place the boards which had been taken up from the floor upright against the wall near the window. By these means I prevented the shutter from immediately attracting observation. Moreover, the lantern remained covered by a slide" ...

²⁷ The German "Schauerroman" ("shudder novel") flourished around the same time as the Gothic novel and can be regarded as its German equivalent. It is important to note that in the late eighteenth century there were some close ties between English and German Gothic; hence "Monk" Lewis's comment to Goethe in 1799 that "German Literature is at present the prevailing taste in England" (*sic* Lewis, qtd. in Ellis 12). According to Coleridge, however, the Gothic novel was "English in its origin, English in its materials, and English by re-adoption" (qtd. in Pirie 3). Both British and German Gothic fiction were popular in America and influenced its local writers.

“But the figure seemed to move?”

“It appeared so, yet it was not the figure that moved but the smoke on which the light was reflected.” ... When the formula of the conjuration was finished, I caused the cover of the box, in which the spirit was burning, to drop down, the saloon was darkened, and it was not till then that the figure on the wall could be distinctly seen, although it had been reflected there a considerable time before.” (*The Ghost-Seer*; cf. *Der Geisterseher*, 41-43)

The ever-increasing number of innovative technologies, especially the magic lantern, opened up extraordinary new possibilities for all kinds of spectacles, shows, and visual performances, including the theater. While the literary Gothic and the Gothic novel in particular used “stylistic appeals to the visual imagination,” Gothic theater, for instance, readily employed “emerging spectral technologies” (Miles, 3rd par.) to literally visualize the Gothic on stage. In the productions of his supernatural dramas, “Monk” Lewis, for example, made use of various *coups de théâtre*,²⁸ which included, among other things, the appearance of a *visible* ghost. In act four, scene two of Lewis’s highly popular melodrama *The Castle Spectre*, which was first performed on 14 December 1797 at the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, one thus finds the following detailed stage direction:

The folding doors uncloze, and the Oratory is seen illuminated. In its centre stands a tall female figure, her white and flowing garments spotted with blood; her veil is thrown back, and discovers a pale and melancholy countenance; her eyes are lifted upwards, her arms extended towards heaven, and a large wound appears upon her bosom. Angela sinks upon her knees, with her eyes riveted upon the figure, which for some moments remains motionless. At length the Spectre advances slowly, to a soft and plaintive strain; she stops opposite to Reginald’s [that is, her husband’s] picture, and gazes upon it in silence. She then turns, approaches Angela, seems to invoke a blessing upon her, points to the picture and retires to the Oratory. The music ceases. Angela rises with a wild look, and follows the Vision, extending her arms towards it.... The Spectre waves her hand, as bidding her farewell. Instantly the organ’s swell is heard; a full chorus of female voices chaunt, ‘Jubilate,’ a blaze of light flashes through the Oratory, and the folding doors close with a loud noise. (206)

Due to his innovative staging of the supernatural, which “produced an electrifying effect on the audience” (Glance), Lewis’s plays enjoyed great success. In fact, many theatrical productions at the time availed themselves of visual effects to enthrall their audiences. Because Lewis was so keen on employing visual effects both in *The Monk* and in his plays, David Pirie has claimed that “Lewis is one author who would undoubtedly have relished the translation of his effects into the cinematic medium” (3).

From the late eighteenth century on, magic lantern spectacles began to evolve into an immensely popular commercial and professional theatrical mass entertainment, advanced especially by famous stage magicians such as Paul de Philipsthal (also known as Philidor) or the Belgian showman Etienne-Gaspard Robertson. These shows frequently availed

²⁸ *Coup de théâtre* refers to a dramatic surprise or turn of events that often involves sensational effects.

themselves of a repertoire of ghastly figures and (other) stock characters from Gothic fiction, which had immediately become (and remained) an inspiring source for these uncanny conjuring acts. Considering the negation of the spirit world brought about by Enlightenment rationalism, the supernatural imagery of these magic lantern spectacles provided a welcome replacement (cf. Hick 153). Given the historical and cultural context, then, it is hardly surprising that these showmen as “detractors from science and reason came to be seen as the enemies of the enlightenment” (Heard 8); although the illusionists themselves often cunningly claimed that their specter shows were actually intended to enlighten audiences “by exposing the frauds of charlatans,” and that “superstition would be eradicated when everyone realized that so-called apparitions were in fact only optical illusions” (Castle 143). As a matter of fact, however, the majority of showmen of course preferred to keep their tricks secret (for example, by concealing the projection process) and obviously rather aimed at intensifying the seemingly supernatural illusions. Consequently, although viewers were told that ghosts did not exist, they were nonetheless confronted with supernatural and spectral figures that they could “objectively” perceive (cf. Hick 153).

The *phantasmagoria*,²⁹ a modified version of the magic lantern show, enjoyed particular popularity throughout Europe and, following the 1801 premiere of Philipsthal’s show at London’s Lyceum Theatre, also in England. In these “proto-cinematic” spectacles (Warner 15), which (just like present-day film screenings) took place in the dark and can be regarded as the precursor to the modern slide-projector show,³⁰ eerie images of ghosts, skeletons, and other unsettling characters such as the bleeding nun – that is, a typically Gothic cast – were projected onto a wall or screen. By moving the lantern, which was set on a trolley, towards and away from the projection screen, the images could be made larger and smaller. This was remarkable since it created the illusion of movement and thus produced stronger effects (on the audience). In addition, sound effects, such as thunder or explosions, and dry ice, which produced fog, were employed to create an uncanny atmosphere and ghostly special effects. In *The Female Thermometer*, Terry Castle provides a lively description of a phantasmagoric ghost show:

²⁹ “Phantasmagoria” is commonly translated as “collection of phantoms,” but could also mean “ghosts speaking out.” The French term “fantasmagorie” is a compound based on “fantasme” (phantasm) and perhaps incorporating the Greek word “agora” (assembly, gathering; cf. *Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary* 1451); or “agoreuo” (to speak; cf. Heard 10) or “agoreuein” (to speak in public; cf. Hick 146). For an elaborate account of the developments of the phantasmagoria, including amusing anecdotes about its effects on audiences, see Mervyn Heard’s *Phantasmagoria* as well as chapter nine of Terry Castle’s book *The Female Thermometer*.

³⁰ A spectacle taking place in the dark was something new for contemporary audiences, who were still used to the fully lit stages of the Georgian era (cf. Heard 9).

Plunged in darkness and assailed by unearthly sounds, spectators were subjected to an eerie, estranging, and ultimately baffling spectral parade. The illusion was apparently so convincing that surprised audience members sometimes tried to fend off the moving 'phantoms' with their hands or fled the room in terror. (143-44)

Robertson, a Belgian physicist, student of optics, inventor, and great fan of Kircher's magic lantern projections, had staged what he called the first great *fantasmagorie* "as a Gothic extravaganza, complete with fashionably Radcliffean décor" at the Pavillon de l'Echiquier in Paris in March 1798 (146).³¹ Like many other showmen, he always gave an introductory speech to create the right atmosphere before his spectacles began and often also ended his shows with a speech and a final eerie *coup de théâtre* (Horton 14).³² What made Robertson's audio-visual spectacles so special was that, on the one hand, he "recognized the uncanny illusionistic potential of the new technology and exploited the magic lantern's *pseudonecromantic* power with characteristic flamboyance" (Castle 146; my emphasis),³³ frequently drawing on popular Gothic iconography; on the other hand, using a mobile fantascope (cf. Hick 151), Robertson's screened (!)³⁴ phantasmagoria gave the impression of vitality and animation (cf. Warner 148) – which would eventually become a characteristic feature of cinema.

Although the phantasmagoric ghost shows were popular in many European countries, they became particularly popular and successful in England. Castle has suggested that, "[given] the indigenous mania for things Gothic, England indeed seemed the natural home for phantasmagoria" (150). By the turn of the century, the phantasmagoria "had become a fully-fledged 'multi-media' show," which enjoyed enormous popularity among "the fashionable élite and sensation-seekers" (Heard 9). Phantasmagoric spectacles such as the "Spectographia," "Optical eidothaumata," the "Phantoscopia," the "catadioptrical phantasmagoria," and many more sprang up everywhere (cf. Castle 150-51). Moreover, within the scope of a continuously flourishing "commercial and consumer society" which had evolved in the course of the eighteenth century, and as a result of which domestic commodities and a variety of personal belongings were no longer reserved for the well-to-do (Porter 181f.), magic lanterns also became a popular entertainment device in private middle-class homes (cf. Castle 154). What was different with nineteenth-century shows, as opposed

³¹ According to Heard, it was not Robertson who invented the phantasmagoria, but Paul de Philipsthal (cf. 10).

³² Castle's book provides various examples. Interestingly, the idea to make use of a prologue as well as an epilogue was later picked up by Tod Browning for his film *Dracula* in 1931.

³³ In part in response to requests from audience members, Robertson seemingly brought back to life dead ancestors or historical figures such as Rousseau, Tell, or Virgil. While their reanimation was harmless, the "resurrection" of Louis XVI had serious consequences for the illusionist (cf. Hick 147).

³⁴ Besides smoke, Robertson used thin gauzes as screens onto which he could project his specters (cf. Warner 148).

to those in the eighteenth century, however, was that the audience members could now *see* the mechanical device and were thus no longer manipulated by the showman but well aware of the trick. Shows were now “almost always preceded by a brief lecture by the [showman]” which explained “the wonders of the technology and science that made the performance possible” (Horton 14); thus, “part of [the audience’s] enjoyment was the making of the spectacle itself” (8). With additional modifications, such as shutters or cranks and improved light sources, the phantasmagoria eventually evolved into an early form of the motion picture projector and thus paved the way for early cinema – and, to some extent, its cinematography (cf. Bordwell and Thompson 441). Interestingly, however, despite all the technological innovations and improvements, the “ghost-connection ... never entirely disappeared” (Castle 154).

Phantasmagoric spectacles had always shown an obvious penchant for spectral figures, popularized through Gothic literature, among other things; and they had a great potential to visualize these sublime apparitions that were normally associated with nightmares, hallucinations, and other figments of the imagination. These shows thus literally gave shape to essentially mental images and therefore “broke down the barrier between mind and machine” (Miles, 8th par.). In her groundbreaking study on the *metaphoric shift* of the term “phantasmagoria” in the nineteenth century,³⁵ Castle has contended that, since the eighteenth century, a “spectralization or ‘ghostifying’ of mental space” had taken place; that is, the focus shifted from external images to internal or mental ones (141-42). This manifested itself both in Gothic fiction – according to Castle, even Radcliffe’s *Mysteries of Udolpho* had already featured haunting mental images (cf. her introduction to the novel, xxiii) – and later also in Gothic-inspired film (see chapter 2.3.). Fred Botting has made a similar claim, namely that “[in] the period dominated by Romanticism, Gothic writing began to move inside:” that is, it was frequently written from a first-person point of view and came to focus on (or “look at”) the internal, psychological machinations and the mental and emotional states of an individual (*Gothic*, 91-92). In this sense, the Gothic came to share an interest in the actual focus of Romanticism, that is, the foregrounding of the individual.³⁶ Sublime and gloomy landscapes here merely played a part as “external markers” of the individual psyche (91). Thus, in the nineteenth century the mind – as “the true ‘Phantasmagoria’” – was often figured as a magic lantern or screen onto which images were projected (cf. Castle 157, 144), something like a

³⁵ In her book, Castle has claimed that the term “phantasmagoria” underwent a shift in meaning from denoting an external and public specter show to denoting the internal phantasms of the mind; she has called this a “metaphoric shift” (141).

³⁶ Paramount (early) examples of such texts would be William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) or Charles Brockden Brown’s American Gothic novel *Wieland* (1798; see chapter 2.4.1.).

cinema of the mind.³⁷ Moreover, it came to be seen as “a phantom-zone – given over, at least potentially, to spectral presences and haunting obsessions” and thus making possible a “new kind of daemonic possession” (144). As a result, in the course of the Victorian era, “phantasmagoria” became a commonplace (psychological) metaphor, gradually replacing the original meaning of the term (cf. Castle 144). It also became a popular emblem of Gothic writings; for example, in the uncanny tales of the American Gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe, who availed himself of both its technical and psychological connotations (cf. chapter 2.4.1). Castle has ascribed these changes to the demystification and secularization of the supernatural that was taking place as a result of the Enlightenment in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, what Susan Sontag has described as “the retreat of old religious ... illusions before the advance of humanistic and scientific thinking” (80). As supernaturalism was replaced by rationalism, “any persistence of spectral or demonic figures” came to be seen as “an effect of mental disorder” (Botting, “Reading Machines,” 7th par.); the spirit world was relocated to the human psyche. In “the new age of unbelief,” “[the] credence that could no longer be given to realities understood *in the form of* images was now being given to realities understood *to be* images, illusions” (Sontag, 80).

All things considered, the Gothic clearly provided these early visual productions with themes and characters, and the symbiotic connection between the literary mode and these techno-visual media thus becomes apparent. It comes as no surprise, then, that the Gothic was also soon discovered by other visual media: film, in particular, as a visual medium par excellence has continuously been inspired by and availed itself of the Gothic – which, in turn, is indeed “particularly suited to the cinema” (Kavka 209). Moreover, it can also be said that “the technology of phantasmagoric illusion ... provided the inspiration for early cinematography” (Castle 154). Consequently, these early (Gothic) spectacles, in particular the phantasmagoria, can be regarded as the ancestors or forerunners of today’s (Gothic) horror film: with their main aim also being to scare the audience for pleasure (just what the Gothic novel had also already intended), they not only offered the delightful thrill of fear, but, more importantly, they also provided and established a great deal of the techniques and strategies by means of which the Gothic was (expected) to be visualized from that point forward.

³⁷ However, Castle has also pointed out that the “crucial connection between phantasmagoria and the so-called ghosts of the mind” had already been made much earlier, for example, in the works of Goethe (156).

2.3. Cinemagic Spectacles: Early (European) Cinema and the Rise of the Gothic Film

These are but shadows of the things that have been.

(Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*)

When in 1896, Louis and Auguste Lumière used their newly developed *Cinématographe*, an innovative camera/projector device, to present their motion picture *L'Arrivée d'un Train en Gare de la Ciotat* (*Arrival of a Train at a Station*) at the Salon Indien of the Grand Café in Paris, nobody could anticipate the enormous impact this film would have.³⁸ Showing a train that seemed to speed directly at the audience, the Lumière brothers' picture not only triggered the tenacious urban legend of people fleeing their seats in terror at the sight of this extraordinary spectacle, but it also paved the way for further films that would also provide "an experience of simultaneous shock and safety;" a sensation that people were quite keen on in those days (Gunning, "Birth of Film," 22).³⁹ This "contradictory energy of modernity ... to be shocked and cushioned at the same time" (22) was also reflected in the great popularity of such things as thrill rides in amusement parks. This energy in turn provided the ideal background for what Tom Gunning has termed the "cinema of attractions:" a cinema that was less concerned with narrative and instead foregrounded spectacular and shocking visual effects – just what had been a distinctive quality of the magic lantern and phantasmagoria shows, and to some extent even of the Gothic novel. Thus exploiting and demonstrating the technical and illusory possibilities of the medium with its now dynamic images and the resulting potential to evoke a new sense of space, the cinema of attractions celebrated its status as an attraction while also catering to the prevailing demand for the illusion of movement and visual sensation (cf. Hick 213).

One pioneering and highly influential representative of this early "exhibitionist" form of cinema, which flourished between 1890 and 1906/07 before the emergence of the narrative feature film (cf. Gunning, "Cinema of Attractions," 57), was the French filmmaker or "cinemagician" George Méliès, who had been a great fan of the Lumière brothers' achievements. Although they had advised Méliès "not to waste his time" on the moving

³⁸ This event in film history (together with an earlier screening that took place on 28 December 1895) is often taken to be the inaugural moment of "cinema" as a commercial apparatus since it marks the date when the Lumière brothers began to use their *Cinématographe* to perform public projections in front of a *paying* audience. Recent research, however, has shown that in fact there had already been public projections before paying audiences in early 1895 in the US and Germany, although the devices used in these performances (the Panoptikon, the Phantoscope, and the Bioskop) were less sophisticated than the *Cinématographe* (cf. Gaudreault and Gunning 4-6).

³⁹ For an intriguing discussion of the Lumière brothers' short film, especially as being constructive of "the founding myth of cinema's birth" (90), see Martin Loiperdinger's essay "Lumière's *Arrival of the Train*: Cinema's Founding Myth."

picture (Rigby 10), he continued to pursue his visionary interest in cinema technology. A skilled stage illusionist and today recognized as one of the grand masters of the fantastic- and the trick film, he became internationally famous not only for his elaborate mise-en-scène, but also for his use of innovative special effects – although his cinematic spectacles still bore a close resemblance to the live performances of the magic theater he had been practicing before, in which he had also employed magic lantern devices.⁴⁰ While the Lumière brothers had failed to recognize the new medium's great potential, Méliès soon discovered that he could manipulate reality, space, and time to great effect.⁴¹ For example, by means of combining different techniques, including superimpositions (double exposures), he successfully produced the illusion of transformations, disappearances, or materializations (cf. Worland 32). One of the most important innovators of his time, Méliès thus paved the way for the special effects that would also become a staple characteristic of Gothic cinema.

Méliès's film *Le voyage dans la lune* (*A Trip to the Moon*, 1902), commonly regarded as a precursor of the narrative film and the first science-fiction film, is today probably his best-known work, but there are many other works in his filmography that are of particular interest with regard to the emerging Gothic film. These films, sometimes dream-inspired, often revolved around supernatural events and uncanny subjects and figures, such as ghostly hauntings or the devil – typical Gothic subjects that obviously lent themselves perfectly to his “cinemagic” purposes. *Le Manoir du Diable* (*The Devil's Castle*, 1896), for example, considered by many to be both the first horror and vampire film, tells the (more amusing than frightening) story of a bat that transforms into Mephistopheles, who then produces supernatural figures from a cauldron before he is eventually destroyed by a cavalier (played by Méliès himself). In general, Méliès obviously liked to play with the ambiguity between reality and illusion – which would become one of the cornerstones of Gothic cinema – and thus availed himself of all means available to visually enhance this sensation. It is important to note, however, that unlike future films of the fantastic and the uncanny, his trick films were not intended to frighten viewers, but rather to astonish them (cf. Worland 33).

Many (film history) accounts of audiences' reactions to early cinema describe how these allegedly naïve viewers were frightened and panicked during early film performances (in the face of these new technologies). However, it has to be assumed that by 1900 people

⁴⁰ Like magic lantern shows, early film screenings were also usually live performances, in which the showman was present and interacted with the audience. Later, the intertitles in silent films replaced the showman or narrator (cf. Hick 212-15).

⁴¹ Legend has it that Méliès accidentally discovered the *stop trick* due to a malfunction of his camera, which created the possibility of letting objects suddenly jump, transform into other objects, reappear in a different place, or even disappear altogether (cf. Bordwell and Thompson 114).

were already quite used to visual attractions and spectacles and were probably merely fascinated and enthralled by the amazingly realistic illusion of the “mobile spectacle” on the screen and the powers of technology (Gunning, “Birth of Film,” 20; also cf. “Aesthetic of Astonishment”).⁴² If there were extreme reactions, which was evidentially the case, this was most likely “a response to the new sensory demands and overstimulation delivered by the medium of motion pictures” as a product of modern life, which was in itself a shock experience, as Walter Benjamin had observed (Gunning, “The Birth of Film,” 20).⁴³ Similar to magic lantern and phantasmagoria shows that were popular before and during the emergence of the film medium, but all the more so, early film not only had the “technical capacity of altering one’s sense of reality” (Botting, “Reading Machines,” 12th par.), but it also confronted the viewer with the conundrum between accepting the realism of what one was actually seeing on screen and knowing that what one was seeing was not real (cf. Perry 4).

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the film medium underwent steady development while more and more filmmakers in different countries shared in discovering, exploring, and taking advantage of the medium’s ever-increasing extraordinary possibilities, which continued to astonish audiences. First and foremost, apart from the medium’s potential to display a coherent narrative through moving pictures, it lent itself to stunning visualization techniques, as Méliès’s films had already demonstrated. The space-time logic could be manipulated, and *montage* also opened up fascinating new possibilities. It comes as no surprise, then, that a great number of filmmakers also turned to fantastic and often typically Gothic subjects for their productions, as these seemed particularly suitable and promising. On the one hand, they practically called for extraordinary techniques and were thus probably more challenging and exciting to visualize than “reality;” on the other hand, they obviously also caught the spirit of the age. A brief look at early twentieth-century cinema suffices to show that, in fact, many filmmakers availed themselves of the Gothic, and “Gothic figures became staples” in their productions (Botting, “Reading Machines,” 11th par.).

A very prominent German cinematician of this time, Paul Wegener, for example, “gave, between 1913 and 1918, decisive impulses to the fairy-tale film, drawn from the literary gothic, which in turn provided the templates also for the films of the fantastic and the uncanny, as they emerged after World War One” (Elsaesser). Wegener was attracted to

⁴² In this context, it is interesting to note that “[as] early as the beginning of the twentieth century, films were being made that presented the story of the cinematographic train and its naïve spectators for the amusement of a knowing audience,” for example, Edwin S. Porter’s 1902 film *Uncle Josh at the Moving Picture Show* (Loiperdinger 91).

⁴³ That is not to say that people might not still have watched the rapid evolution of technology in general with a sceptical and at times perhaps fearful eye.

fantastic and Gothic subjects, in particular, because they allowed him to explore different cinematic techniques, such as trick photography, superimposition, and special effects (cf. Elsaesser). He was tremendously fascinated by the phenomenal and seemingly unlimited technical possibilities of film. As Wegener put it: “the mysterious possibilities of the camera heated my imagination” (Wegener, qtd. in Drexler 220; my translation). Evidently, Wegener had discovered – and this was probably also true for many subsequent filmmakers – that the Gothic with its fantastic elements and features lent itself perfectly to the new medium and offered fascinating possibilities for visualization techniques.⁴⁴

This was particularly visible in Wegener and Rye’s famous film *Der Student von Prag* (*The Student of Prague*, 1913). This film, which directly invoked the Romantic period by being set in the 1820s and also identified itself as a “Romantic Drama,” was obviously inspired by the Gothic works of E.T.A. Hoffmann, Adalbert von Chamisso, E.A. Poe, and other Romantic writers (cf. Eisner 40 and Tybjerg 27). Accordingly, it was shot in the dark and often narrow medieval parts of the old town of Prague (that is, it was shot on location, which was rather unusual at the time) and frequently featured shadowplays to create a mysterious and gloomy atmosphere (cf. Eisner 42). The film tells the story of a young man named Balduin (played by Wegener) who sells his mirror image to the sinister charlatan Scapinelli (John Gottowt) in order to climb the social ladder. Henceforth, however, he is followed by his *Doppelgänger* – a very prominent theme at the time (cf. Schönemann 7), which, in Wegener’s opinion, cinema was especially well equipped to capture (cf. Eisner 40). In an act of despair, Balduin eventually shoots his persecutor, tragically killing himself in the process (as becomes a typical *Doppelgänger* story).⁴⁵

Interestingly, the film’s special effects (cinematographer Guido Seeber had used a double exposure technique to create the *Doppelgänger* effect) apparently made the optical illusion of the protagonist’s double so real that, if a contemporary film critic is to be believed, “people screamed in the pit and did not dare look at the screen because there they saw the same figure incarnate twice. The impossible had become reality in this film” (Noa, qtd. in Drexler 224; my translation). In fact, according to Lotte Eisner, it was with the release of *Der Student von Prag* that “it was immediately realized that the cinema could become the perfect medium for Romantic anguish, dream-states, and those hazy imaginings which shade so

⁴⁴ Incidentally, there was an ongoing debate in Germany (and other countries) at the time concerning film’s artistic potential. To become art, film should do what only it could do. Wegener and his production team were convinced that the medium’s “artistic essence lay in the fantastic.” In general, “the idea that the cinema had an essential affinity with the fantastic was quite widespread at the time” (Tybjerg 32).

⁴⁵ It was *Der Student von Prag* that inspired Otto Rank to write his study on the double (written 1914), in which he noted the double’s suicidal effect on the self. Rank’s work, in turn, influenced Freud’s essay on the uncanny (1919).

easily into the infinite depth of that fragment of space-outside-time, the screen” (40). Wegener’s film enjoyed great success with both critics and audiences, resulting in the production of a variety of similar pictures, among them Wegener’s two *Golem* films (a first version from 1914, which is now lost, and the second, popular version from 1920). Remarkably, much of *Der Student von Prag*’s atmospheric composition – not to mention the scene in which Scapinelli’s shadow looms eerily on a wall; a scene that clearly inspired many subsequent Gothic films – already anticipated the style that was soon to become a trademark of German cinema.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the devastating outcome of which had left a conspicuous mark on the German populace, Wegener together with other filmmakers came to play an important part in the formation of a stylistic movement that would come to be known as German Expressionism.⁴⁶ According to Gilberto Pérez a form of romanticism that “pushes to the extreme of fear” (123), the German Expressionist style reflected the nightmarish impressions, those haunting images of death and mutilation, left by the real-life horrors of the war. German Expressionism is of particular significance for the history of Gothic cinema: on the one hand, this artistic movement, which had its heyday in the early 1920s and sought to produce films as works of art, was clearly linked to the Romantic and Gothic traditions, as Eisner and others have repeatedly pointed out;⁴⁷ on the other hand, it had (and continues to have) a great influence on (the aesthetic of) many subsequent Gothic films. First and foremost, German Expressionism was characterized by its extraordinary, highly stylized mise-en-scène. A combination of geometrically absurd set designs, distorted shapes, and elaborate plays of light and (painted) shadows served to create a particular, usually uncanny and oppressive, mood and atmosphere as well as a sense of vagueness and obscurity;⁴⁸ all of these elements “[interacting] graphically to create an overall composition” (Bordwell and Thompson 448). Interestingly, the actors in German Expressionist motion pictures did not simply move within the films’ settings, but, forming visual elements themselves, rather merged with them (cf. 448). Like (later) Gothic fiction, early silent Expressionist films showed a marked preference for stories of tortured souls, preferably suffering from madness, which the peculiar look of the sets was meant to reflect. Here, it is interesting to consider the parallel development of Freud’s psychoanalysis, especially his notion of the “uncanny” (his

⁴⁶ Around the same time that these German films were released, significant films were also produced in Denmark, Sweden, and Russia, for example, yet “the German contribution to the [horror] genre remains the most substantial” (Tybjerg 25).

⁴⁷ It is important to note that, at the time, German filmmakers also availed themselves of literary source materials because they felt that this would enhance their films’ status as works of art.

⁴⁸ At the time, film stock was incapable of showing darkness and shadows.

essay “Das Unheimliche,” with notes on the double, was published in 1919) and his theories of repression and the unconscious, which became increasingly known and popular at the time. Shadows – which together with their psychological meaning would always play a central role in Gothic cinema – featured particularly prominently: according to Eisner, Germans had a deeply rooted liking for shadows and chiaroscuro (cf. 17), which, in her view, represented “a sort of twilight of the German soul, expressing itself in shadowy, enigmatic interiors, or in misty, insubstantial landscapes” (8).⁴⁹

Two seminal examples of Expressionist film and “foundation stones” of Gothic horror cinema (Newman, qtd. in Tybjerg 15), which not only established German cinema as a major international player, but also clearly influenced and forever shaped the (visual style of the) Gothic film, are Robert Wiene’s *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920) and F. W. Murnau’s *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (*Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror*, 1922).⁵⁰ *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, the first and probably the most impressive example of German Expressionist cinema, was a particularly dark film, presenting a subtextual commentary on the horrors of World War I.⁵¹ Although it was in fact a rather inexpensive production, it nevertheless immediately caused an international sensation and became a great success, especially (with filmmakers) in the United States. Shot completely in a small studio and stylistically indebted to Expressionist theater, its “radical otherness” and “visual shock-effects” both challenged the rules and conventions of (Hollywood) filmmaking of the time and “[revised] the existing grammar of cinema”: *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* “[‘performed’] violence and confusion not only on the narrative level ..., but more importantly on the aesthetic plane” (Kaes 41-47). Like *Der Student von Prag*, Wiene’s film also clearly drew on German Romanticism and the Gothic. And like Wegener, Wiene was also convinced that Expressionism provided a perfect vehicle for the representation of the unreal and the fantastic (cf. Tybjerg 35). According to Heidi Kaye, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* – which in a review in 1920 film critic Martin Proskauer already called a “Wegweiserarbeit” (guide work) for future cinema – was perhaps “the film most influential

⁴⁹ This (by now often criticized) statement has to be viewed against the background of the historical context, of course.

⁵⁰ It is important to note that films such as *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* or *Nosferatu* were labelled horror films – or Gothic films for that matter – only in retrospect. Originally, these movies were produced and marketed as “art movies” (cf. Hutchings 3).

⁵¹ Interestingly, as David Skal, among others, has noted, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* was originally conceived by writers Carl Mayer and Hans Janowitz as “a political parable of unchecked authoritarianism,” Caligari representing the state and Cesare the sleepwalking masses who had been sent out to kill (41). However, producer Erich Pommer and director Robert Wiene added a prologue and an epilogue, which ultimately reduced the story to the ravings of a madman (cf. Skal 43 and Eisner 18).

on later Gothic movies”: “its striking imagery and evocative themes” not only “inspired the genre,” but, as a matter of fact, “transformed the American approach to Gothic cinema” (181).

Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari tells the uncanny story of Dr. Caligari (Werner Krauss), a sinister showman, and his subordinate somnambulist medium Cesare (Conrad Veidt), who has been asleep for 23 years. During the day, Caligari presents Cesare as an attraction in his cabinet at a local fair and has him tell the visitors their fortune. At night, however, Cesare lurks about the city and, under the influence of his master Caligari, commits a series of murders. One day, Francis (Friedrich Fehér), the narrator, visits Caligari’s cabinet together with his friend Alan (Hans Heinrich von Twardowski) and Jane (Lil Dagover), the girl they are both in love with. Alan asks Cesare how long he will live, and the somnambulist tells him that he will die the next day. When the prophecy comes true, Francis suddenly realizes that there must be a connection between the murders happening in the small town of Holstenwall and Dr. Caligari, and he begins to investigate the case with the help of Jane’s father. One night, Jane herself almost becomes Caligari and Cesare’s victim, but instead of killing her, Cesare only abducts her. Carrying her through the sleeping town, he is soon pursued by a mob headed by Jane’s father. Exhausted, Cesare eventually drops dead. Francis discovers that Caligari is actually the director of a local insane asylum, who is so obsessed with the old legend of Dr. Caligari, a hypnotist, and his murderous somnambulist that he has come to impersonate the doctor himself. Confronted with Cesare’s death, Caligari throws a lunatic fit and is imprisoned in his own asylum. In a rather complex plot twist at the end of the film, however, the viewer is forced to realize that it is actually Francis who suffers from a mental disorder and that the entire story was merely his fantasy. Consequently, the viewer has to acknowledge that he or she has simply fallen victim to the delusions conjured by Francis’s ill mind.

What would become a typical feature of the early German silent films of the 1910s and 1920s, the film’s focus was thus on the inner self, the psyche, or the dark side of the soul (cf. Thiele 344). However, *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* not only uncannily involved the viewer in this intricate net of mental confusion, but it actually went a step further and put the viewer right into a madman’s perspective.⁵² Wiene’s extraordinary cinematography and his claustrophobic mise-en-scène complete with Expressionist décor in black and white, extreme play of light and (painted) shadows as well as a distorted, geometrically absurd stage design with weirdly shaped walls, doors, and windows, for example, were supposed to represent this psychological landscape. At the same time, as Thiele has claimed, the decor also represented

⁵² In this context, it is interesting to consider Kaes’s observation that, blurring the boundaries between reality and illusion, “the uncertain truth value of the film medium itself” is emphasized (54).

the “collective soul” (355; my translation) or the “collectively felt psychological mood” (344; my translation), the uncertainty and fear, of post-war Germany. In any case, Proskauer’s observation that “[the] decor in ‘Dr. Caligari’ [was] not built as one *sees* things, but as one *feels* them in particular emotionally tense moments” (my translation) is convincing. The film’s claustrophobic feel was further emphasized by the camera, which used only very few long shots, hardly ever panned or tracked, and instead alternated between medium shots and abrupt close-ups (cf. Kaes 47f.). Moreover, particular lighting effects “isolated the characters and split or deformed spaces and objects” (46); another technique that future Gothic cinema would make frequent use of. Interestingly, as the case of *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* shows, the film medium, then, could be used – and evidently had a great potentiality – to visualize psychological and emotional phenomena, and many filmmakers in the years to come would avail themselves of this feature.

Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens (*Nosferatu: A Symphony of Terror*), a milestone in the history of Gothic cinema and the vampire film, was released in 1922.⁵³ Directed by F.W. Murnau and based on the screenplay by Henrik Galeen, who had also written the screenplay for *Der Student von Prag*, *Nosferatu* was an unauthorized adaptation of Bram Stoker’s Gothic novel *Dracula* (1897) – thus providing a direct link to the Gothic tradition. As Pérez has noted, the “romantic roots of expressionism are nowhere more evident than in this extraordinary film” (124). Apart from several distinct alterations – for example, *Nosferatu* is translocated to the year 1838, that is, the past, and partly set in Germany; the names of characters were changed, probably to conceal the original source in order to avoid a lawsuit; and the appearance of Murnau’s protagonist, Count Orlok, has nothing in common with Stoker’s Dracula – the film adhered to the basic plot line of Stoker’s novel.

Nosferatu recounts the story of Count Orlok/Nosferatu (Max Schreck), who leaves his native Transylvania to settle down in the German town of Wisborg, bringing the plague right with him. As in Stoker’s novel, the film’s first part focuses on a young real estate agent, Thomas Hutter (Gustav v. Wangenheim), and his adventurous journey to Transylvania. Hutter was sent by his shady employer, Knock (Alexander Granach), to present Count Orlok with the paperwork for his new estate in Wisborg. The young man’s stay at the count’s gloomy castle, however, proves fateful: he is not only transformed into a vampire, but Orlok also develops an obsession with Hutter’s wife, Ellen (Greta Schroeder). As soon as the count has settled in Wisborg – right across from the Hutter’s home, of all places – he begins to chase the young woman. Meanwhile, however, Ellen has learned that a vampire can be destroyed if a pure-

⁵³ Tybjerg has argued that *Nosferatu* can be viewed as “a bridge between the fantastic horror genre of the silent period and the genre horror that would develop after 1930” (37).

hearted woman willingly lets him drink her blood so that the vampire loses track of time, which will result in his destruction by the rising sun. Putting her plan into action, she leaves her window open for the count, who soon after walks into the fatal trap.

Like *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu* was also a product of its time, reflecting on the chaotic conditions (inflation, unrest and upheaval, violence, etc.) of the early Weimar Republic (cf. Ruthner 50) as well as on the still-haunting horrors of the First World War.⁵⁴ Moreover, in line with other Gothic films of the time, Murnau's film also shared in the prevailing "fascination with and dread of human mortality and fragility" (Kaye 182), creating a scenario of impending doom. His title character, the undead vampire Count Orlok/Nosferatu, not only personified the Other as a direct threat to individuals but, bringing the plague as chiffrage for a global threat to Wisborg and thus Germany (cf. Ruthner 36), he also embodied an indirect threat, a contagious disease, that endangered an entire population. Murnau chose his protagonist's (immediately iconic) peculiar and rather disturbing appearance accordingly: unlike Stoker's Dracula, Murnau's Nosferatu comes across as an eerie phantom. His bald, pallid head; his darkly framed, penetrating eyes; the huge, pointed ears; his crooked nose; and the rodent-like teeth as well as his long, claw-like fingers combine to give him the appearance of an otherworldly creature, more predatory animal than human. Murnau's mythopoetic version of the vampire strongly affected the cinematic vampire mythos; especially the new characteristic he added to Stoker's vampire persisted: namely that a vampire is destroyed by sunlight (cf. Marriott and Newman 19).

Murnau's extraordinary visual realization of the *Nosferatu* material proved highly influential for Gothic cinema in many respects. In contrast to *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*, *Nosferatu*'s Expressionist style, which was created through "careful shot composition and lighting rather than distorted sets" (Worland 48), was not used to represent a madman's point of view, but, first and foremost, to evoke a particularly sublime mood and atmosphere. The now-legendary shot of Nosferatu's shadow lurking ominously on a wall (strongly reminiscent of a very similar shot of Scapinelli in *Der Student von Prag*), which inspired numerous directors of subsequent Gothic films, is just one great example. Thus, while being an Expressionist film, Murnau's film obviously differs visually from the set design of Wiene's film, for example. *Nosferatu*'s highly atmospheric settings (often what one might want to call "latent places/loci," that is, places that seem to await or herald events – an essential element of Gothic cinema (Ruthner 38)) provided the film with a particularly uncanny feel. For example, Murnau skillfully visualized the sublimity of the sea and of the fog-shrouded,

⁵⁴ For an insightful discussion of the film as a reflection on World War I, see Kaes's chapter "The Return of the Undead" (87-130) in his book *Shell Shock Cinema* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2009).

desolate Carpathian mountains – reminiscent of paintings by Caspar David Friedrich and calling to mind the sublime landscapes of Ann Radcliffe (cf. chapter 2.1.) – which are frequently drowned out by the howling of (“Were-”)wolves and the wind. Moreover, he visualized Orlok’s gloomy castle in a typically Gothic manner. Remarkably, great parts of the film were shot on location (which was still quite unusual at the time), thus locating danger in “real” places rather than in artificial studio landscapes (cf. Ruthner 38).

By the late 1920s, German Expressionism as a movement had come to an end; an expressionist style, however, now spelled with a small “e” to distinguish it from the movement, continued (and continues) to exist (cf. Bordwell and Thompson 449). In particular, films that dealt with the unconscious or mental processes (dreams, hallucinations, madness), especially film noir emerging in the 1940s (cf. Tourneur’s films) and the psychological (Gothic) horror film, continued to avail themselves of expressionist techniques, as these were particularly effective in evoking mental states and creating an atmosphere of mystery or delusion (cf. Kaes 56). When Hollywood began to take over as the dominant film capital, and many of the filmmakers, cinematographers, and actors who had been involved in the German Expressionist movement went to try their luck in the “dream factory,” expressionism also became a highly popular style there. Before turning to the developments of the Gothic on the American screen in chapter 2.4.2., however, it is useful to first take a look at the origins of American Gothic.

2.4. American⁵⁵ Gothic (and) Visual Culture

On an introductory note:

The previous chapters have focused exclusively on the developments of the affinity between the Gothic and the visual media in the European context (with special attention to England and Germany), as Europe (first and foremost England) was not only the birth place of the Gothic novel, but also the locus where the most significant formative developments of early Gothic visual culture, in particular film, took place. Before proceeding with another milestone in the history of Gothic visual culture, that is, the Gothic's entry into American cinema, now, however, it is imperative to first take a look at the American context since the 1790s and the developments of the Gothic there since this will be of fundamental importance for the discussion of Jacques Tourneur, Roger Corman, and Tim Burton in Part II. In doing so, the following writers, who played a pioneering role in the shaping of the American Gothic and are thus of particular importance, as well as some of their works shall receive special attention: Charles Brockden Brown, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe – the “three great originators” of American Gothic fiction (Lloyd-Smith, “Nineteenth-Century American Gothic,” 109).

2.4.1. The Rise of American Gothic Fiction

*Let others draw from smiling skies their theme,
And tell of climes that boast unfading light,
I draw a darker scene, replete with gloom,
I sing the horrors of the House of Night.*

(Philip Freneau, “The House of Night”)⁵⁶

Wer mit Ungeheuern kämpft, mag zusehn, dass er nicht dabei zum Ungeheuer wird. Und wenn du lange in einen Abgrund blickst, blickt der Abgrund auch in dich hinein.

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*)

From the beginning, America has been particularly receptive to the Gothic. When in the second half of the eighteenth century the Gothic novel saw its golden age in England, it also immediately appealed to an enthusiastic readership in America. In a country where reason and rationalism as well as religion dominated everyday life, the Gothic novel as a form that

⁵⁵ The term “America” is used for matters of simplification to refer to what is today the United States of America.

⁵⁶ This stanza, which nicely summarizes the American approach to the Gothic (cf. Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic*, 29), is taken from Philip Freneau's “The House of Night: A Vision” (102). This gloomy poem, published in 1786, prefigured the Gothic works of such writers as Brown and Poe, among others (cf. Leary 156).

stimulated the imagination and thus offered an escape from and opposition to the rational world presented a welcome distraction. In addition, “despite – or possibly because of – regular denunciation from the pulpit” (Lloyd-Smith, “Nineteenth-Century American Gothic,” 109), American readers showed a strong liking for tales of the dark machinations of the soul and the (haunting) powers of evil. But the Gothic not only fascinated readers; it also proved quite popular with American writers: since tales of superstition and the supernatural were considered an “affront to reason and decency,” this “no doubt only compounded their attraction for the young writers who were struggling to invent an American literature comparable to that of Europe” (109). The irony of the rise of the American Gothic, then, of course, is striking: a civilization that was “born of Enlightenment ideals” (Goddu, “Introduction,” 265) and intent on exorcising superstition and the supernatural in fact produced a culture that was fundamentally Gothic (cf. Savoy, Introduction, viii). Eventually, the Gothic – “antithetical to all smiling American faiths” (Edmundson 5) – came to constitute a major part of the nation’s domestic literature. In his famous book on the American novel, Leslie Fiedler even went so far as to argue that American fiction in general has always been “essentially a gothic one” (142). In his view, the American novel – the national genre and the literary form best suited to express the “dark vision” of America and its “obsession with violence” (28) – which had evolved from European models, in particular the Gothic novel, was “pre-eminently a novel of terror” (26): “nonrealistic and negative, sadist and melodramatic – a literature of darkness and the grotesque in a land of light and affirmation” (29).

On the face of it, however, the Gothic seemed oddly out of place in the new world of America. Obviously, conditions there differed considerably from those in the Old World. What had worked well and had been highly effective in terms of evoking terror in readerships in England and Europe – such as stories of a corrupt nobility, usually set in gloomy Gothic structures or similar dark places – was less appealing, hardly imaginable, or simply absent, foreign, or strange to (readers in) the New World. Although it continued to share many (cultural) traditions with Europe, America lacked an old history of its own as well as ancient historic sites or relics. It is thus hardly surprising that many early American Gothic writers – bearing in mind that these writers “were effectively still a part of the British culture” and strongly influenced by the British literary tradition (Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic*, 3) – emulated and partially imitated British (and European, for example, German) models. Yet, even these early authors of American Gothic literature already produced a new and often innovative, also highly visual, form of Gothic fiction that was clearly distinguishable from its

parent. The American Gothic thus already began to gain momentum as an independent form. In fact, this represents a logical development: America needed its own version of the Gothic; a version that – even if it continued to show traces of the original Gothic styles – was adapted to the American context and its very own conditions. American Gothic, then, became a “bricolage: bits and pieces of various traditions, transformed and superimposed upon a new landscape and a different culture” (Ringel 145).

As a matter of fact, in its own way, America turned out to be an ideal site for the Gothic, and it soon became apparent that it had great inspirational sources of its own. American writers could draw on a geography and history that differed substantially from that of Old Europe. The naturally wild, untamed, and uncharted landscapes of the New World alone opened up entirely new possibilities for domestic writers. The wilderness not only formed a stark contrast to the small “civilized” world of the settlements, but, inhabited by “savage” peoples with their foreign customs, it was also home to the “barbaric Other;” a conventional Gothic threat that was readily available and did not have to be invented. The awe-inspiring wilderness thus provided great sublime settings, which the Old World no longer knew and could at best create artificially.⁵⁷ In other words, “the European picturesque aesthetic was not needed in America, for the sublime was already there” (Kornwolf, qtd. in Bottalico 15). American Gothic texts, however, often came to feature what Lloyd-Smith has termed the “negative Sublime,” that is, an “occulted landscape of despair” (“Can Such Things Be?,” 69). Events occurred in “affectively ‘dead’ settings: impenetrable woods; meaningless or malignant wildernesses; depressive landscapes ...; or their architectural equivalents;” creating the impression that the land itself was evil (67).

The Puritan legacy, serving as a kind of (haunting) *ersatz*-past, also showed great promise for American Gothic narratives. From the beginning, this legacy, which originated with the first settlers in seventeenth-century colonial America, had had a strong influence on American culture, shaping it with lasting effect. The Puritan belief system and consciousness, Puritan ideology and conventions, constant conflicts between the Puritan settlers and the Native Americans as well as historic events such as the Salem Witchcraft Trials (1692-1693) – a dark spot in the history of America which continued to haunt the nation – provided a good deal of particularly suitable material for tales of (sinful) transgression and guilt, the supernatural, and the grotesque that would eventually constitute a major part of American Gothic fiction. Puritan writing – poetry, accounts, or sermons such as Jonathan Edwards’s “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (1741) – also proved to be very inspiring. Per se

⁵⁷ Within the scope of the Gothic revival (cf. chapter 2.1.), for example, artificial wild and romantic gardens were landscaped.

already quite Gothic, it was highly figural and made extensive use of visual imagery. Together with the highly visual British Gothic novel, this pictorial quality obviously also influenced and shaped American Gothic fiction.

Emancipating itself from British (and European) Gothic models, then, American Gothic came to concentrate on and revolve around the oppositions between light/good and dark/evil in relation to new, domestic topics. Besides the wilderness and the frontier or the Puritan legacy, Gothic texts also dealt with racial issues, often turning the “savage” Indian or the dark-skinned man into the shady or evil “Other.” In fact, the American Gothic became “haunted by race,” as Teresa Goddu has claimed (“Introduction,” 269). Social, political, and cultural issues regarding (the fragile nature of) America’s young democracy and its relatively undeveloped society also concerned Gothic writers, often revealing a rather pessimistic or at least skeptical view. This clearly shows that although American Gothic fiction did indeed have an escapist function it nevertheless also addressed important concerns of its time. What is more, American writers soon realized that the Gothic as a “forum” allowed them “to explore areas otherwise denied them”; here, they could “tell the story of those who are rejected, oppressed, or who have failed” (Crow 2).⁵⁸ However, the Gothic was now mostly understood *symbolically*; that is, “its machinery and décor [were] translated into metaphors for a terror psychological, social, and metaphysical” (Fiedler 28).

Speaking the unspeakable (cf. Goddu, “Introduction,” 270), American Gothic fiction, then, became particularly interested in, perhaps even obsessed with, tales of psycho-social terrors. The individual, familial, and communal psyche, haunted by the past, gained center stage. Generally speaking, the Gothic went from dealing with external horrors and terrors to focusing on domestic and internal ones.⁵⁹ In the course of these developments, the “grand Gothic terrors of a supernatural kind” gave way to the social, human, and more private world (Botting 114), and monumental Gothic structures were replaced accordingly by more appropriate settings such as the remote house (located in and contrasted against the wilderness). Gothic horrors and terrors thus moved much closer to home.⁶⁰ The private, domestic space became the new locus of mysteries and unspeakable atrocities – literally

⁵⁸ As Fiedler has noted, the classic American (Gothic) novel was largely male-centered (“a literature of horror for boys” (29)) and usually revolved around a (guilty) male protagonist on the run to avoid “civilization,” including the confrontation with women. This man was often accompanied by a good (though ambiguous, often dark-skinned) “natural man,” who, over time, however, became the Devil himself (cf. 26).

⁵⁹ A trend that was also visible in British Gothic texts. As noted earlier, “the period dominated by Romanticism” saw the “internalisation” of the Gothic; that is, “Gothic writing began to move inside” (Botting 91). The focus was thus shifted from sublime landscapes and objects of the exterior world to the psychological landscape of the individual mind.

⁶⁰ As Lloyd-Smith has noted, this was an “inevitable effect,” since America lacked the established social structures of the Old World (“Can Such Things Be?,” 58).

turning into a space of what Freud would later call “das Unheimliche” (the “un-homely” or uncanny, that is, the familiar or homely suddenly revealing an unfamiliar and disturbing side). Guilt and the individual’s guilty conscience, weighing heavily on the transgressor and turning life into a nightmarish (moral) struggle within and often against society, came to play a particularly prominent role. The evil that lurks within – that uncanny other part of the divided self (cf. Stableford 61) – was foregrounded, frequently finding expression in the double, or *Doppelgänger*. Analogously, specters and monsters were largely relocated to the psyche (cf. chapter 2.2.). It was now the individual’s mind that became a haunted place, struggling with feelings of guilt and shame, delusions, paranoia, obsession, and the like.⁶¹ The conventional Gothic interplay between light and dark thus gained a metaphorical dimension as the shadowplay of the haunted mind. But it was not only the individual’s (repressed) personal past, marked by dark secrets, that returned to haunt the mind.⁶² Like a ghost, the sins of the fathers – a concept dating back to Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* – would also relentlessly revisit the (psyche of the) present generation and thus continue to haunt it. Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok dealt with this phenomenon in their work on the “transgenerational phantom.” In “Notes on the Phantom,” Abraham explained how an undisclosed (repressed) family secret – the “phantom,” a “formation of the unconscious that has never been conscious” (173) – is handed down from one generation to the next: “what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (171).

In this regard, the Puritan legacy, once again, provided writers with a plethora of suitable material. The New World – the “promised land,” as the Puritans saw it – had been regarded with great hopes as a promising place given to a people chosen to be “a city upon a hill”; a people that grounded its society on Enlightenment principles.⁶³ Yet, darkness (metaphorically speaking) continued to prevail. As Fiedler explained, “[a] dream of innocence had sent Europeans across the ocean to build a new society immune to the compounded evil of the past from which no one in Europe could ever feel himself free. But the slaughter of the Indians, who would not yield their lands to the carriers of utopia, and the abominations of the slave trade ... provided new evidence that evil did not remain with the world that had been left behind” (143). Moreover, Puritans had also turned against their own kind. Persecution of

⁶¹ The (private) house could thus be ascribed a metaphorical dimension as the haunted psyche, its different rooms representing parts of the unconscious where secrets are hidden (repressed) and inscrutable architecture of the building leading to one getting lost (cf. Punter 174ff.).

⁶² The “return of the repressed,” a concept developed and established by Freud, has always played a central role in (American) Gothic fiction: desires, memories, etc. that had been repressed re-emerge, or return, from the unconscious to haunt one’s consciousness.

⁶³ The phrase “city upon a hill,” a quote from the Gospel of Matthew (5:14), became a common notion in American culture through John Winthrop’s famous sermon “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630). Winthrop had used it to refer to the Puritans’ function as role model for the world.

alleged revolutionaries, that is, individuals or groups who were believed to have turned against the system, or of other enemies of the Puritan cause had cast a poor light on them. The Salem witch hunt, for example, continued to hang like a shadow over the collective American conscience; the more so as the main motives underlying this hysteria had been base motives such as personal jealousies and envy. In other words, America, although it had divorced itself from paternal Europe and its past, had its own “special guilts” (Fiedler 31), which continued to haunt the national conscience. As Jonathan Rigby has noted, such a “propensity towards paranoia and conspiracy theories, spreading like a cancer from officialdom to the mass of ordinary Americans and resulting in the unreasoning persecution of supposed subversives, was to resurface several times in the succeeding centuries” (9). The American Gothic, then, by exhuming these dark transgressions, came to “[disrupt] the dream world of national myth with the nightmares of history” (Goddu, *Gothic America*, 10).

One of America’s first native-born professional writers and, more importantly, father of the American Gothic was Charles Brockden Brown (1771-1810). As is known, Brown’s work was greatly influenced, among others, by the radical writings of William Godwin, author of *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) and the partly Gothic novel *Things as They Are; Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794), which attacked the British government and social system of his time. Brown’s own work, in turn, also inspired many (subsequent) writers of Gothic fiction, as, for instance, Godwin’s daughter Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*. Among Brown’s great achievements are his pioneering roles in the advancement of the psychological Gothic and in the successful adaptation of the Gothic to American soil by customizing certain elements and by turning to domestic (political and social) issues. Brown was eager to develop a distinctly American form of intellectual (Gothic) writing. Well aware “that the field of investigation, opened to us by our own country, should differ essentially from those which exist in Europe,” he repudiated “[puerile] superstition and exploded manners; Gothic castles and chimeras” (3). Instead, Brown liked to set his anti-realist narratives in places that were given local names, such as Philadelphia or New York, although these places bore almost no resemblance to the originals; the Indian, that “living [extension] of the threat of the wilderness,” came to stand in for corrupt noblemen, aristocrats, or inquisitors; and haunted castles and dungeons became haunted forests and caves (cf. Fiedler 155). Moreover, it was Brown who “established in the American novel a tradition of dealing with the exaggerated and the grotesque, not as they are verifiable in any external landscape or sociological observation of manners and men, but as they correspond in quality to our deepest fears and guilts as projected in our dreams or lived through in ‘extreme

situations” (155). Between 1798 and 1800, Brown, who referred to himself as a “moral painter” (3), published his four major novels: *Wieland; or, The Transformation, an American Tale* (1798), which was the first American Gothic novel; *Ormond; Or, The Secret Witness* (1799); *Arthur Mervyn; Or, Memoirs of the Year 1793* (Part I in 1799 and Part II in 1800); and *Edgar Huntly; Or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (1799). In these dark tales of persecution, murder, and other atrocities, which reflect the author’s concern about “the ability of individuals to govern themselves in a full-fledged democracy” (Savoy, “The Rise,” 175), Brown concentrated on aberrations of the human mind and soul. His protagonists’ characters and morals are put to the test as they are confronted with either external abnormalities or mental delusions (cf. Grabo x). With regard to the psychological Gothic, two of his novels, both written in epistolary form, are of particular interest: *Wieland* and *Edgar Huntly*, in which a “double-tongued” ventriloquist and a somnambulist, respectively, play a central role.

Wieland, a first-person narrative told from the point of view of Wieland’s (traumatized) sister Clara,⁶⁴ tells the nightmarish tale of Theodore Wieland, an intellectual and God-fearing family man, who destroys his idyllic life as he is driven by what he believes to be a divine voice to murder his entire family (except for his sister) and eventually commit suicide. Obviously a reference to the Puritan religious mania, Wieland’s religious fanaticism and delusion appear to be inherited from his father, a German missionary, who had emigrated to America to spread his religious beliefs among the Natives; in other words, he is haunted by his father’s “phantom.” In the end, however, Wieland realizes that he has fallen victim to the trickery and psychological manipulation of a “biloquist” or ventriloquist by the name of Carwin; an “amoral agent” (Smith 40), who is able to imitate voices and whose memoirs Brown appended to the novel.⁶⁵ The seemingly supernatural voice and the resulting events are thus explained away. The novel – presenting a skeptical view on America’s young democracy and its at times naïve utopianism, as various critics have noted – seems to suggest that no soul is immune to evil, and that “every ever-so-peaceful idyll can be haunted by a dark force that is hidden in the past” (Bronfen 300; my translation). The (metaphorical) interplay between light/good and dark/evil also found expression in Brown’s use of “a specifically American landscape for chiaroscuro effects,” for example, in the “shadowy intricacies of the Wieland estate at night” (Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic*, 43). Interestingly, the story, which was

⁶⁴ *Wieland*, as a story focusing on the subjective view of an individual, is a first-person narrative, a technique that became quite popular at the time. Radcliffe’s or Lewis’s novels, by contrast, were told from a third-person point of view (cf. Smith 40-41).

⁶⁵ In *Wieland*, Brown also partly revisited his own family past (and trauma); that is, the events surrounding his father Elijah’s arrest, imprisonment, and exile in 1777 as the result of alleged complicity with the British in the Revolutionary War and the consequential sudden transformation of friends into enemies (cf. Kafer 1ff., 113ff and Elliott vii).

inspired by “an authentic case” (cf. Brown’s “Advertisement” to *Wieland*), that is, a real murder that had occurred in upstate New York a few years before, is never entirely resolved as to the degree of Carwin’s actual involvement in the crimes, leaving the reader with a sense of ambiguity and obscurity.

Edgar Huntly; or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker, which Brown now deliberately wrote as an American response to the British Gothic novel, was published only one year later. In his address “To the Public” preceding the novel, Brown clearly stated his intention, namely “to exhibit a series of adventures, growing out of the condition of our country.” In his view, the “incidents of Indian hostility” and “the perils of the western wilderness,” which lie at the root of this story, were “far more suitable” than conventional Gothic machinery (3).⁶⁶ With this in mind, Brown set his narrative outside Philadelphia, on the margins of civilization, in the rural wilderness of Pennsylvania in the year 1787. The story is recounted by the title character in letters to Mary Waldegrave, his murdered friend’s sister: determined to find out who killed Waldegrave, Huntly sets out to investigate the case. Near an elm tree, which had been the scene of the murder, he encounters a morose, sleep-walking man named Clithero Edny (a *Doppelgänger* figure), whom Huntly initially suspects of the crime and thus follows into the dark woods of Norwalk. In a forced confession, however, it is revealed that although Edny was possibly responsible for the death of another person, he was not involved in Waldegrave’s murder. One night, Huntly (unaware of being a somnambulist himself)⁶⁷ wakes up in the pit of a cave, where he not only has to fight a panther (whose blood he drinks after defeating it), but also a band of Natives, whom he brutally kills. Thus, although Huntly repeatedly insists that his intentions are benevolent, he also shows a destructive and animalistic side (cf. Stineback 21-22). In Fiedler’s view, the “magic” of this novel lay in the “irrational reality of the id” (157), the protagonist’s psyche being reflected in the wild landscape. At the end of the novel, Huntly’s somnambulism is diagnosed; Edny, whose innocence in connection with Waldegrave’s murder is confirmed, commits suicide; and it is revealed that Waldegrave was in fact killed by Natives.

Another important figure in the history of the American Gothic, who was obviously inspired by Brown’s fiction, was Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864), the author of such

⁶⁶ Two decades after the publication of *Edgar Huntly*, Washington Irving’s (1783-1859) *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (1819-1820) joined in this new taste for American domestic fiction. Besides mostly satiric tales (of the supernatural), such as the famous story of “Rip Van Winkle,” the *Sketch Book* also contained “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow,” an eerie short story which incorporated Gothic elements. “Sleepy Hollow” had a considerable influence on the American Gothic imagination and became an integral part of American (popular) culture. A discussion of this work is included in chapter 6.2.

⁶⁷ As Philip Barnard and Stephen Shapiro have noted, Brown regarded sleep-walking “as a socially generated symptom of emotional damage;” physical symptoms being “signs of breakdowns in an individual’s response to social networks” (xvii).

famous novels as *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) or *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851). One characteristic feature of Hawthorne's work was the particularly strong interest in seventeenth-century New England Puritanism – his country's own and inescapable past. In part, this interest was obviously due to his personal family history: Hawthorne's birthplace, Salem in Massachusetts, had been the scene of the Salem Witchcraft Trials, in which one of his ancestors, John Hathorne, had been actively involved as a judge. Allegedly, Hawthorne was so ashamed of this circumstance that he changed his last name, adding a "w," to dissociate himself from his Puritan ancestor. More importantly, however, the Puritan legacy simply had much to offer in terms of religious mania and fanaticism, superstition, and a belief in witchcraft and the supernatural,⁶⁸ issues that provided an ideal basis for his narratives about guilt, personal sin and the sins of the fathers, and the conflict between good and evil in human nature. Interestingly, although Hawthorne employed a broad range of Gothic elements and effects in his predominantly allegorical writings to produce a particular "mood of Gothic strangeness" (Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic*, 33), he seldom developed fully Gothic narratives.⁶⁹ In this regard, it is also interesting to consider Savoy's observation that even though Hawthorne did borrow conventional Gothic elements, he refused to treat them literally, but used them figuratively instead (cf., "The Rise," 178-179).

One text which does have a particularly Gothic quality to it nicely illustrates Hawthorne's contribution to the American Gothic: the short story "Young Goodman Brown" (1835), in which the author named and shamed the haunting shadow cast by the (his) Puritan past. Set in the village of Salem, Hawthorne's highly symbolic short story, which reflects on "the dark intensity of Puritan imagination, bordering on mania" (Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic*, 53) revolves around the mysterious nightly journey of the young goodman Brown. The story begins with Brown kissing his young wife Faith goodbye (parting with Faith in both senses of the word) to go on a journey into the nightly forest. A short while later, he meets a mysterious man, who closely resembles Brown, claims to have been acquainted with his ancestors, and appears to be the devil himself – obviously a cynical comment on the part of Hawthorne on his ancestors' involvement in dark doings. As the two proceed further into the gloomy forest on their way to some kind of unholy ritual, they encounter many of Brown's

⁶⁸ This is evident from Puritan writings, such as Cotton Mather's "The Wonders of the Invisible World" (his defense of the Salem Witchcraft Trials, published in 1693, in which he expresses his belief in witchcraft), or the fact that so-called spectral evidence (that is, a witness testified that the accused person's (detached) spirit or specter had appeared to him or her in a dream or vision) was admitted in court at the time.

⁶⁹ As Lloyd-Smith has noted elsewhere, "American writers increasingly came to strike the Gothic note in macabre detailing rather than by invoking the genre *in toto*" (Lloyd-Smith, "Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fiction," 117).

respected townspeople, who, however, turn out to be not the good Christians he believed them to be. Suddenly, Brown hears Faith's voice and discovers in terror that she is also partaking in the ritual. Realizing that he has lost his Faith (again in both senses), Brown, mad with despair, decides to give in to the dark machinations. Upon his last attempt to save his Faith, the scene suddenly vanishes and Brown finds himself all alone in the dark woods. Returning to Salem the next morning, where everything seems to be the same, the young man is uncertain whether his experience in the haunted forest was real or just a dream. Either way, the events change Brown into an embittered and suspicious man, resulting in a life of gloom.

From a present-day perspective, especially with (American) cinema in mind, Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849) is probably the most influential, popular, and inspiring of these three representatives of the American Gothic tradition with regard to the Gothic imagination in America and beyond. Internalizing and domesticating the Gothic and obviously inspired by the work of Brown,⁷⁰ Poe, "a synthesizer of what came before him" (Perry, 12), became particularly well known for his psychologically complex narratives, which often featured (stylized) Gothic elements.⁷¹ As he (facing reproaches that his tales were simply an imitation or even a plagiarism of German models) once emphasized: "If in many of my productions terror has been the thesis, I maintain that terror is not of Germany, but *of the soul*" (*Poetry*, 129; my emphasis). In his dark, (often ironic)⁷² morbid and macabre tales, his protagonists' extreme states of mental disturbance, which occasionally seem to border on insanity, usually serve as an explanation for seemingly supernatural events. Poe liked to blur the boundaries between (objective) reality and (subjective) perception or consciousness so that the true nature of terrors would mostly remain unresolved.⁷³ Like Brown, then, Poe largely substituted the external horrors of European Gothic fiction for internal psychodramas, their claustrophobic and dark settings reflecting the psychological landscapes of the protagonists – something that cinema, especially German Expressionist film, would later also do to great effect (cf. chapter 2.3.).

⁷⁰ It is fair to say that Poe domesticated the Gothic, even though many of his tales are actually set in "indeterminate quasi-European" locales rather than in "specifically American" ones (Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic*, 46).

⁷¹ Incidentally, Poe's highly psychological tales inspired the writings of many psychoanalysts, such as Freud or Lacan, and theorists, among them Barthes, Derrida, and Cavell (cf. Leer xi).

⁷² In the early nineteenth century, the Gothic vogue was waning, and a number of authors wrote Gothic-inspired satires and parodies. Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* (1818) is a prominent example of such a parody. Besides irony, Poe (as well as Hawthorne) also used a comic or burlesque tone in some of his narratives.

⁷³ Poe also "understood that absence is more unsettling than presence, particularly when the absent manifests itself indirectly as uncanny, the psychological, cultural, or physical otherness just below the threshold of what is conscious and conventional" (Savoy, "The Rise," 186).

Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" nicely exemplifies his penchant for psychological tales of Gothic terror.⁷⁴ Set in a remote, labyrinthine mansion in a gloomy and decaying landscape (all highly symbolic, representing a psychogram), "The Fall of the House of Usher" (1840), one of Poe's most popular tales, traces the mysterious events in the Usher household until the eventual collapse of both house and family line. The story begins with the arrival of an unnamed narrator, who visits the somewhat dilapidated mansion upon the request of his old friend Roderick Usher, the last male descendant of the family. Usher claims that he is suffering physically and emotionally, his symptoms suggesting mental illness. Usher's beloved twin sister, Madeline, has also fallen ill and soon succumbs to the strange disease. Her brother decides to entomb her in a vault below the house for two weeks to avoid the doctor's dissection of her body. A few days later, while the narrator is reading to his increasingly hysterical friend, he suddenly hears noises. He then learns that Usher has been hearing these noises for days and that he is convinced of having buried his sister alive. Suddenly, huge wooden panels slide back, revealing Madeline in a bloodstained white robe. As Madeline attacks her terrified brother, they both drop dead. The narrator flees the mansion; looking back, he sees the house collapse and being swallowed by the tarn.

As in many of Poe's tales, "The Fall of the House of Usher" centers on the hauntings of the mind and the horrors of death, including premature burial and the return of the dead. At the same time, it demonstrates Poe's obvious penchant for stories of (sadistic) violence against women, which has been noted by various critics. All of these Gothic elements coincide in Madeline, whose true nature remains somewhat ambiguous. Castle has pointed to her phantasmagoric quality: Madeline is "a mental image" that "appears to come to life, fantastically, *in the flesh*;" "[the] phantom [becoming] a reality" (Castle 161). Like many other nineteenth-century Romantic writers, Poe frequently employed phantasmagoric imagery – the phantasmagoria with its claustrophobic, disorienting, and sublime atmosphere being "a kind of master trope" at the time (155; cf. chapter 2.2.) – to illustrate or visualize mental phenomena, such as the mistaking of illusions for reality. Well aware of the phantasmagoria's technical meaning, Poe also used phantasmagoric imagery in many of his tales "to describe an eerie optical effect" (160). The story of "Ligeia," for example, which also revolves around the return of a dead beloved woman, features a vivid description of an optical illusion created by the draperies in Lady Rowena's ghastly-lit bridal chamber – the scene being strongly reminiscent of phantasmagoric ghost shows:

⁷⁴ For an interesting discussion of Poe's "The Fall of the House of Usher" as well as what the authors call the "Usher" formula ("a fluid set of variables"), see (the introduction to) Poe, "The House of Usher," and the *American Gothic* by Dennis Perry and Carl Hinckley Sederholm.

But in the draping of the apartment lay, alas! the chief phantasy of all. The lofty walls ... were hung from summit to foot, in vast folds, with a heavy and massive-looking tapestry ... The material ... was spotted all over, at irregular intervals, with arabesque figures ... But these figures partook of the true character of the arabesque only when regarded from a single point of view ... [because] they were made changeable in aspect. To one entering the room, they bore the appearance of simple monstrosities; but upon a farther advance, this appearance gradually departed; and step by step, as the visitor moved his station in the chamber, he saw himself surrounded by an endless succession of ... ghastly forms. The phantasmagoric effect was vastly heightened by the artificial introduction of a strong continual current of wind behind the draperies – giving a hideous and uneasy animation to the whole. (*Selected Tales*, 34)

Like his fellow American Gothic writers, Brown and Hawthorne, who, following the example of their British and European counterparts, employed a highly pictorial language to depict their horror and terrors, Poe thus also made use of elaborate (phantasmagoric) imagery to create vivid visualizations of his morbid and macabre tales. Once again, then, the immediate affinity and reciprocal relationship between the Gothic and the visual media becomes apparent. The medium which, since its inception, has been particularly apt – probably more so than the American (Gothic) novel – to actually “visualize” what Fiedler called America’s “dark vision,” is of course the film medium. It thus comes as no surprise that, like European cinema, American cinema also immediately availed itself of the Gothic, which provided an abundance of suitable material.

2.4.2. The Origins of American Gothic Cinema: Early American Film, Hollywood, and the Gothic before World War II

[The] Hollywood of Hollywood Gothic is perhaps less the geographical location than a psychic shadowland we all inhabit, that private theatre to which we return again and again to watch the midnight movies of our minds.

(David J. Skal, *Hollywood Gothic*)

Der Film strahlt die Erscheinung des Entsetzlichen an, dem wir sonst im Dunklen begegnen, macht das in Wirklichkeit Unvorstellbare zum Schauobjekt.

(Siegfried Kracauer, "Das Grauen im Film")

As the previous chapters have shown, visibility and visual spectacle have always been primary qualities of the Gothic – and they have also always constituted a fundamental part of American (social) culture.⁷⁵ Considering that the foundations for America's cultural nation were laid at a time when visibility and the visual experience were gaining increasing importance in the Western world (cf. chapter 2.1.), this is hardly surprising. The emergence of film as a visual medium par excellence in the late nineteenth century has had a particularly strong influence on America's visual and social culture, and it has continued to play a most significant role to this very day. Although film was obviously not an exclusively American invention – that is to say, the Americans Thomas A. Edison and his assistant W. K. L. Dickson with their Kinetograph camera and Kinetoscope peep-hole viewing device were only two of the pioneers in the invention of the moving picture – it was in America that film, including Gothic cinema in particular, would eventually assume its most popular form.

The beginnings, however, were slow. Edison, like the Lumière brothers, had initially not believed in the future of the motion picture. He reconsidered the making of motion pictures only at the turn of the century, when the fantastic, frequently Gothic-inspired trick films of French cinemagician George Méliès (cf. chapter 2.3.) turned out to be a tremendous success not only in Europe but also in America (Edison had illegally appropriated a copy and shown it in the US – with great success). Soon, his company also began to produce and distribute films that featured fantastic elements and supernatural figures, which lent themselves perfectly to exploiting the new medium's technical possibilities. Featured among them were *The Cavalier's Dream* (1898), which used a patented stop-motion animation technique to show an old witch transforming into a beautiful young woman, and the *Uncle Josh* films (both 1900), in which the title character is haunted by sinister figures (cf. Rigby 11). Other companies also climbed on the bandwagon. Edison's major rival, for example, the

⁷⁵ The strong visual imagery and highly figurative language of American Puritan writings, for example, which were among the first literary works created in the New World, clearly corroborate this.

American Mutoscope & Biograph Company in New York, which had been founded by Edison's former assistant, Dickson, also released a number of films that dealt with dark forces, such as *The Prince of Darkness* (1900) featuring "His Satanic Majesty himself," or *The Thirteen Club* (1905), in which the club's members are replaced by skeletons (cf. 11).⁷⁶

It was with the films of Edwin S. Porter, one of Edison's directors, and those of D.W. Griffith, who eventually became the director of Biograph, that the American (narrative) film and its industry were revolutionized. Porter's already skillfully edited films played a pioneering role in the development of narrative continuity (continuity editing). Today, his then-spectacular motion picture *The Great Train Robbery* (1903),⁷⁷ which featured a number of innovative cinematic techniques (for example, parallel editing or crosscutting), is often said to have inaugurated the classical American film (cf. Elsaesser 24) and, furthermore, movies as commercial entertainment. Griffith, today best known for his highly influential films *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) and *Intolerance* (1916), advanced continuity editing techniques considerably, which were to become the standard for the linear narrative film. Moreover, he also introduced and developed numerous other cinematic techniques that would forever change filmmaking, such as the simultaneous use of different cameras and angles instead of just one fixed camera, crosscutting, back-projection, and the split-screen.

The growing public interest in motion pictures at the time resulted in a boom in cheap storefront film theaters, known as nickelodeons. While during the 1890s films had primarily been shown to middle-class audiences in vaudeville theaters (in particular to women), from 1905 on, a new working-class audience came into play (again especially attracting women and also children), which was now able to afford this form of entertainment due to the small admission fee of only a nickel, hence the name (cf. Gaudreault and Gunning 11). The great popularity of these film theaters, now available to a broad audience, in turn increased the demand for new motion pictures, eventually resulting in the systematic and fast production of films. Because they could be devised ahead of time, nickelodeons soon showed predominantly fiction films, and from 1908 filmmakers also began to adapt popular plays (stage melodramas) or (Gothic) novels (cf. 18-19), partly because these were regarded as more highbrow and would thus cater to a more sophisticated demand. In fact – presumably also due to the Gothic's visual character, its fantastic elements, and the resulting suitability for

⁷⁶ In 1908, Edison actually cooperated with Biograph to establish the MPPC (Motion Picture Patents Company) in order to gain control over other film companies by licensing them to produce, distribute, and show films.

⁷⁷ One "emblematic shot" made *The Great Train Robbery* a particularly spectacular film, namely a medium close-up of a cowboy pointing his gun directly at the camera and thus the audience (Salt 33).

the new medium with its ever-growing repertoire of technical possibilities – film soon became “an avid, unashamed plagiarizer of earlier, literary forms of the Gothic” (Kavka 209).

In other words, various adaptations of popular Gothic texts such as Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) or Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Doppelgänger* story *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) were produced, marking the beginning of cinema’s evolution into “the place where the major texts of Gothic writing [would be] kept alive in popular rather than literary culture” (Botting 165). Stevenson’s novel alone inspired a whole array of increasingly psychological screen adaptations (not only in the US). In 1908, for example, William Selig’s (now lost) adaptation of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which was actually based on the Thomas Russell Sullivan stage version of the novel that was still touring the US at the time, premiered in Chicago. In 1912, Thanhouser released their version of the Jekyll-and-Hyde story, which was also partly based on the stage adaptation and featured a grotesque-looking Hyde as well as various impressive transformation sequences. Only one year later, in 1913, Thanhouser’s film was followed by yet another adaptation by IMP, to name but a few. The year 1910 saw the release of the first film version of *Frankenstein*, which was directed by James Searle Dawley for Edison. Interestingly, in this rather dark film, the monster is literally “cooked up” in a cauldron. Although this version has little in common with subsequent adaptations, comparing looks, it might well be that the monster in this film (played by Charles Ogle) – which, due to its wild hair and eerily long fingers, is strongly reminiscent of the German figure of Heinrich Hoffmann’s Struwwelpeter (1845) – served as the visual inspiration for Tim Burton’s *Edward Scissorhands* eighty years later (see chapter 6.1.). *Life Without Soul*, directed by Joseph W. Smiley, was released in 1915, adding “a modernized and Americanized version” of the *Frankenstein* material to the list (Matthews, 8). These early adaptations, however, which usually had a running time of less than 20 minutes (or two reels), were hardly ever faithful to the novels and their Gothic aesthetic. They merely borrowed the novels’ basic storylines (if at all) and were obviously mostly oriented toward showing spectacular special effects. Besides European Gothic source materials, some tales by American Gothic writers, such as Irving, Hawthorne, or Poe, were also adapted by different companies. In 1910, for example, the same year that Edison released *Frankenstein*, they also provided an adaptation of Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables*, again directed by Dawley. Despite the founding of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures in 1909 (later renamed the National Board of Review to avoid the term “censorship”), the major movie companies continued to make fantastic pictures (cf. Rigby 12), which now often had a running time of more than an hour. Thus, in 1914, for example, Griffith’s sophisticated

picture *The Avenging Conscience* (the title says it all), a highly psychological, Poe-inspired “proto-horror” feature film was released (Worland 42).

Towards the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, a film industry comprising the production and distribution of movies, now the major form of entertainment, had emerged. By this point, Los Angeles, or rather Hollywood, in California with its mild climate and relatively steady (and thus filming-friendly) weather, had become the heart of the industry, and most major film companies had settled in the area. Before long, Hollywood became – and would remain – one of the world’s leading and most influential (commercial) film industries and the world’s most famous one, with the term now signifying more than just a geographic location.⁷⁸ It would soon attract film professionals from all over Europe, among them many Germans, who not only came to play an important role in the development of the new entertainment industry, but also in the evolution of Hollywood Gothic.⁷⁹

Inspired by contemporary German cinema, which frequently drew on the dark tales of terror by Romantic and Victorian writers, Hollywood also began to develop a great interest in Gothic horror in the 1920s. As a result, the Gothic soon conquered the American film industry, where it was then popularized. Hollywood was particularly intrigued by German Expressionist cinema, which was held in high esteem due to the supposed “aura of artistic excellence” that had been established by (visually) highly sophisticated pictures such as *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* or *Nosferatu* (cf. chapter 2.3.) (Worland 54). It should also be added, however, that at the time, the American film industry was criticized for its “staleness” and was thus urged to breathe new life into its productions, as film historian David Skal has noted; the highly praised German style was regarded and suggested by many as a convenient model (cf. *Monster Show*, 38). As a consequence, German filmmakers, such as Paul Leni and F.W. Murnau, were in great demand, and Hollywood studios lured many of them to join their production teams. As anticipated, these filmmakers not only imported their ideas, but also their filmic traditions and homegrown visual styles, the most seminal one being German Expressionism with its asymmetrical set designs and painted shadows, which “allowed the filmmakers to experiment with filmic technology and special effects and to explore the twisted [realms]” of the psyche (Kaes 57).

In the years to come, these foreign cinematicians applied their techniques, visual strategies, and styles to American productions, thereby exerting considerable influence on the

⁷⁸ That is to say, the world’s greatest movie industry besides India’s “Bollywood” – although the name itself again suggests the enormous influence of Hollywood.

⁷⁹ With the imminence of WW II, a second wave of European cinematicians and filmmakers would follow suit and emigrate to the United States. Among them would, once again, also be many Germans, who had played a pioneering role in early (European) Gothic cinema (cf. chapter 2.3.).

American approach to Gothic cinema.⁸⁰ German director Paul Leni, for example, who had formerly worked for Hollywood's major European rival, Ufa, played an important role in the (aesthetic) development of the Gothic film. His Gothic haunted-house picture *The Cat and the Canary* (1927), an adaptation of John Willard's 1922 Broadway black comedy, "featured the hallmarks of the German style" with its chiaroscuro lighting and stylized sets, and actually "laid the groundwork for Universal's horror tradition" (Worland 54). Moreover, Leni liked to blend a Gothic atmosphere, evoked by his expressionist sets, with humor, a strategy (also known from American Gothic fiction (cf. chapter 2.4.1.)) that many of his colleagues would emulate and that is still popular today.

Apart from directors, Hollywood also provided many job opportunities for cameramen, cinematographers, and set designers from Europe, and it attracted a number of foreign actors. Among these were many of the early Gothic horror film stars, such as Bela Lugosi and Peter Lorre from Hungary or Boris Karloff from Great Britain. The first American horror film star of the silent era was Lon Chaney, also known as "The Man of a Thousand Faces" because of his extraordinary, self-invented, often appalling and deforming, makeup as well as his highly skilled acting. In particular, his performances in the Gothic-inspired films *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), "two of the mid-twenties' most elaborate spectacles" (Skal, *Monster Show*, 66-67), are still remembered today. Chaney also starred in Hollywood's first (now lost) vampire movie, *London After Midnight* (1927), directed by future star director Tod Browning.

Despite the imminence of what would come to be known as the Great Depression, which would devastate the American economy and leave many unemployed, the period of the late 1920s and early 1930s saw both the emergence of the sound film (the "talkie") and the beginning of American horror cinema's classic phase.⁸¹ In the early days of Hollywood's golden era – heralded by the musical film *The Jazz Singer* in 1927, which ended the silent era, and characterized by the emerging studio system – numerous Gothic horror films were produced, and its conventions, now "mutually understood by artist and audience" (Schatz, qtd. in Worland 19), were established. Horror films, providing a welcome diversion, seem to have always enjoyed a boom in times of crisis, so it is hardly surprising that the Great Depression, which saw its most severe days in 1931 and 1932, both triggered the production of new cinematic horror spectacles and resulted in high movie attendance (cf. Matthews 2). It

⁸⁰ Interestingly, many of these foreign directors preferred (quasi-)European settings over American ones; perhaps because the terrors they evoked seemed "more authentic, because more ancient" (Rigby 9).

⁸¹ As various film historians have noted, the label "horror" was not widely used prior to, and was thus virtually an invention of, the 1930s.

is also interesting to note that horror films made in the period between the two World Wars, when “the faces of the *mutilés de guerre* [were haunting] Europe and America” (Skal, *Monster Show*, 66), were obsessed with physical mutilation and monstrous appearances as an exaggerated variant thereof.⁸² Movies featuring monsters caught the spirit of the time because they reflected conditions of insecurity, anxiety, and fear. However, while films of the 1920s, such as those starring Lon Chaney, had mostly featured monsters who were “grossly disfigured social outcasts, yet still *human*,” films of the 1930s showed a particular penchant for supernatural monsters (Matthews 2).

For the Gothic horror film, the advent of (diegetic) sound, which (literally) added a whole new dimension to the visuals, had groundbreaking consequences, opening up a vast array of new possibilities. Not only did it “[mark] a huge forward leap in cinematic realism,” as “human figures in particular now seemed more excitingly present than before,” but it also enabled filmmakers to “tug harder at viewers’ heartstrings” (Spadoni 8ff.), features that would prove particularly useful for Gothic cinema. In the 1930s, Universal Pictures (formerly IMP), headed by German-born producer Carl Laemmle, produced an entire cycle of Gothic horror talkies – still mostly adaptations and heavily influenced by German Expressionist horror films. Among them were “two undeniable classics of Hollywood Gothic cinema” (Kavka 214): *Dracula* by Tod Browning (1931), which “established the formula of Gothic horror for the other key Universal horror films of the classic period” (Abbott 63), and James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (also 1931).⁸³ The leading actors of both films (Lugosi and Karloff, respectively) and, in particular, the characters they played, would become immortal Gothic horror icons. Since both films had – and continue to have – a significant influence on (the visual aesthetic of) Gothic cinema (cf. Part II) and shaped the prevalent iconography substantially, they shall now be discussed in greater detail.

“In all the annals of living HORROR, ONE NAME stands out as the epitome of EVIL! DRACULA.” Thus advertised by the original movie trailer and released on Valentine’s

⁸² As a reaction to this boom in horror movies, the early 1930s also saw the successful enforcement of a motion picture production code (that is, censorship), known as the Hays Code, by moral reformers. Officially established in 1930 (but not enforced until 1934, leaving the earlier films rather unaffected), it would eventually result in Hollywood’s establishment of the Production Code Administration (PCA) in 1934. With the end of the pre-Code era, the horror boom saw a sharp decline. The Production Code would have a considerable impact on the Gothic horror films to come. At the same time, Great Britain was banning horror movies in the mid-1930s. This also left its mark on American productions.

⁸³ Interestingly, American Gothic cinema after the coming of sound did initially not avail itself of domestic texts (with the exception of those by Poe), but drew on European Gothic sources instead. Peter Hutchings has ascribed this to the simple fact that Hollywood’s early Gothic talkies often drew on the *commercially successful* stage adaptations of these Gothic novels, which, by pure chance, happened to be of European origin. (cf. Hutchings 11-13). In this regard, it should be kept in mind that the Gothic and commercial success have always gone hand in hand.

Day 1931, Browning's *Dracula*, which was based on Hamilton Deane and John L. Balderston's 1927 Broadway adaptation of Stoker's novel, started off Universal's horror cycle. The famous title music for this first horror talkie – a film clearly reflecting the transition from silent to sound era –⁸⁴ taken from the second act of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* would again be used in two other Universal horror films that were released only one year later, *Murders in the Rue Morgue* and *The Mummy*. The film begins with Renfield's (Dwight Frye) uncanny journey to Count Dracula's gloomy castle in Transylvania. Arriving at the castle, he is welcomed by the Count (Bela Lugosi), and the two discuss Dracula's planned relocation to Carfax Abbey in England. After Renfield has retired to his room, he is hypnotized by Dracula into opening a window, faints, and is eventually attacked by the vampire, which results in his going insane. Shortly after settling down in England, Dracula claims his first victim, a young woman named Lucy (Frances Dade). Before long, Lucy's friend, Mina (Helen Chandler), the daughter of Dr. Seward (Herbert Bunston), also falls victim to the Count, but thinks that his nightly visit was just a dream. When Dracula pays a visit to the Swards, Professor Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan) and John Harker (David Manners), Mina's fiancé, notice that he does not have a reflection in the mirror. This convinces Van Helsing that Dracula must be a vampire, and the two men decide to take matters into their own hands. Determined to save Mina, who has meanwhile fallen for the Count and is also slowly turning into a vampire herself, they visit Dracula at Carfax Abbey, where Van Helsing puts an end to both the vampire's "life" and Mina's condition by impaling Dracula in his coffin.

As in the stage version, Count Dracula was played by Bela Lugosi (born Béla Blaskó). His majestic performance, idiosyncratic accent (underlining his foreignness)⁸⁵, and dark looks (although missing the now vampire-typical fangs) forever shaped the popular imagination with regard to this figure and its future impersonations. (Lugosi's makeup was done by Universal's makeup artist Jack P. Pierce, who would actually create all of the studio's famous monsters that would later become icons of American (horror) culture.) In particular, Lugosi's opening lines, "I am Dracula" and "I bid you welcome," have long achieved cult status. The German cinematographer Karl Freund, a pioneer of the moving camera who had been

⁸⁴ Besides the sound version of *Dracula*, a silent version for theaters that could not show talkies was also produced (cf. Skal, audio commentary). Moreover, a Spanish version, often praised as visually superior, was produced, directed by George Melford and shot after hours on the same sets.

⁸⁵ As Robin Wood has argued, American cinema's horror in the 1930s was always foreign and un-American, and it underwent a "steady *geographical* progress toward America": from foreign horror in the 1930s to all-American horror (124-26). To this claim, Hutchings has added that although 1930s horror was indeed largely foreign and un-American (especially in the Universal productions), some films were also set in contemporary America (14).

involved in the production of popular German Expressionist films such as *Der Golem* (*The Golem*, 1920), apparently played a central role in the film's production. According to Skal, it was him and not Browning who directed most of the movie (cf. *Monster Show*, 121). Be that as it may, *Dracula* became a highly atmospheric masterpiece. Using glass paintings (by Frank Booth), the sublime landscapes of the Carpathian Mountains and the enormous interiors of both Dracula's partly ruinous, Gothic-looking castle in Transylvania and Carfax Abbey were evoked, complete with massive Gothic vaults; an 18-foot wide spider web with a huge spider at its heart, which evidently serves as a signifier of Dracula's fatal trap/ping (cf. Bronfen 56); numerous candle stands and grand fire places; and heavy antique furniture. The film's Transylvanian and London settings were created in a studio, thereby making them "more mythic than realistic or modern" (Abbott 62). Fog and heavy shadowplay also add considerably to the film's eerie feel, as do the uncanny close-ups of Dracula's face, his eyes frequently being highlighted by flashlights for greater effect.

While, unlike their German counterparts, most American Gothic horror films in the 1920s had avoided or explained away the supernatural as well as any form of supernatural agency, for example, by exposing ghosts as frauds (cf. Worland 53), *Dracula* was now a quintessentially supernatural Gothic horror film. In fact, Browning's adaptation, which was a first cautious Hollywood approach to such a subject matter, not only featured the "first supernatural vampire ever depicted in Hollywood" (played by Geraldine Dvorak), but, more importantly, the film once and for all opened the doors for supernatural, fantastic, uncanny, and grotesque themes (Skal, audio commentary). To enhance the film's after-effect, the initial film version had concluded with an epilogue by Dr. Van Helsing (Edward Van Sloan), adopted from the theatrical performances, in which he assured the audience that "there *are* such things," that vampires did in fact exist (cf. "The Road to Dracula").

Interestingly, in Browning's version, important moments of the action take place *off-screen*; that is to say, uncanny events are rather narrated than visualized (cf. Bronfen 61). While several critics have reproached Browning for not making full use of the available cinematic means, others have suggested that this might also have been an attempt at increasing the level of ambiguity, which would heighten the Gothic experience. Van Helsing's impaling of Dracula at the end of the film, for example, is not shown, leaving it open whether the Count is really destroyed or not and whether Van Helsing is thus "conqueror of the danger" or "part of it" (Jung, qtd. in Bronfen 60). As Skal has suggested, one should consider "how much more chilling it is not to see the action; prompted by what is unseen, we complete the uncanny event in our own minds" (audio commentary) – a simple

but effective strategy that many subsequent Gothic films would eagerly avail themselves of. Concerning Browning's broad abandonment of special effects and the fact that this film mostly makes use of a static camera instead of a moving one, Elisabeth Bronfen has convincingly argued that this could also have been quite deliberate: perhaps, this first horror talkie wanted to savor the new possibilities of sound in film as a medium of horror (cf. 63).

"MILLIONS have been thrilled, MILLIONS are *waiting* to be thrilled ... by the greatest HORROR the screen has ever known! 'FRANKENSTEIN'." Alluding to both *Dracula*'s success and to the horrors this film had presented, the trailer to Universal's next hit, *Frankenstein*, also released in 1931, promised that this film would show even greater horrors and thrills.⁸⁶ The film thus picked up where *Dracula* had left off (at least in its original version) and began with a prologue, a "friendly warning," very much in the fashion of the phantasmagoria shows (cf. chapter 2.2.). Again performed by Edward Van Sloan, who once more played a scientist (Dr. Waldman) in this film, the prologue provided the following advice:⁸⁷

How do you do? Mr. Carl Laemmle feels it would be a little unkind to present this picture without just a word of friendly warning. We are about to unfold the story of Frankenstein, a man of science who sought to create a man after his own image without reckoning upon God. It is one of the strangest tales ever told. It deals with the two great mysteries of creation – life and death. I think it will thrill you; it may shock you; it might even horrify you. So if any of you feel that you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now's your chance to ... well, we've warned you.

Following these warning comments, the film began. *Frankenstein* revolves around Henry Frankenstein (Colin Clive), an ambitious young scientist, who is determined to create human life – much to the chagrin of his soon-to-be-wife Elizabeth (Mae Clarke); his friend Victor (John Boles); his mentor, Dr. Waldman (Edward Van Sloan); and his father, Baron Frankenstein (Frederick Kerr). With the help of his devoted assistant, Fritz (Dwight Frye), Frankenstein collects parts of human corpses and creates a human body. By means of elaborate electrical devices in his laboratory, he succeeds in reanimating the creature, ecstatically crying "It's alive" when it comes to life. Soon, however, the scientist begins to loathe his creation, and Frankenstein's monster falls victim to neglect, torment, and misunderstandings. As a result of its (misinterpreted) distress, it begins to go after its creator. At the same time, as a consequence of the accidental drowning of a little girl, the monster

⁸⁶ Universal's second adaptation of a popular Gothic novel in fact proved to be so horrifying that it was immediately rejected by several countries. In the United States, however, despite excited reviews, it became a huge success.

⁸⁷ The prologue was actually added long after the film's production was completed, one reason being the anticipated need to avert possible objections from religious groups (cf. Behlmer).

itself is hunted down by an angry mob of villagers, ending in a final (and, for the monster, fatal) confrontation between creator and creation.

Frankenstein was directed by James Whale.⁸⁸ When asked why he wanted to make this picture, Whale replied: “Of thirty available stories, it was the strongest meat, and gave me a chance to devil in the macabre. I thought it would be amusing to try and make what everybody knows is a physical impossibility seem believable. Also, it offered fine pictorial chances, had two grand characterizations, and had a subject matter that might go anywhere. And that’s part of the fun of making pictures” (qtd. in Behlmer). One of the film’s greatest and most memorable achievements was, of course, Frankenstein’s horrific-pathetic monster, played by Boris Karloff (born William Henry Pratt). Although, at the time, nobody could anticipate the full extent of the impact this film would have, it gave birth to yet another one of horror film and American popular culture’s most prominent, everlasting icons. In fact outdoing Lugosi’s popularity, Karloff became Universal’s new star (interestingly, his name does not appear in the cast list at the beginning of the film; in fact, a question mark signifies that the monster is not identified at all, probably to create a first bit of suspense).

Preparation for the making of the film included the screening of a selection of German Expressionist films, such as *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* or *Der Golem*.⁸⁹ This explains the dark, shadowy, and distorted look of the settings in the film’s horror scenes, among them the cemetery, the wind mill at the end of the film, and the Gothic tower, in particular.⁹⁰ As Worland has observed, the film’s dark scenes – heavy with shadowplay, shadows being “one of the crucial elements that the Universal series [exploited] for the visualization of the Gothic” (Kavka 214) – were always alternated with brightly illuminated, peaceful scenes. This not only formed a strong visual contrast, but also offered relief, partly achieved through long shots that conveyed a sense of openness (cf. 163). Whale’s film thus literally (that is, visually) opposed dark and light, including their respective metaphorical connotations. Interestingly, none of the scenes were accompanied by music (the creation scene employs the

⁸⁸ As a matter of fact, Robert Florey, who had actually already produced an approximately 20-minute test version of *Frankenstein*, featuring Lugosi as the monster, had initially been assigned to this task.

⁸⁹ Another obvious visual inspiration besides German Expressionism, which establishes a nice link to Romanticism, is worth mentioning: the scene, in which the monster pays Elizabeth a visit (to rape (?) and kill her) and seemingly accomplishes its evil plan, ends with a tableau showing Elizabeth’s apparently dead body lying on her bed. The way her body is positioned on the bed, dressed in her white wedding gown and with her curly blond hair and her left arm hanging from the bed’s side – just as Shelley had described it in her novel – was obviously inspired by, and is thus a reimagination of, Füssli’s Gothic painting *Der Nachtmahr* (*The Nightmare*, 1781) – only that in this tableau, the woman is not dreaming but unconscious, and the uncanny creature has already left.

⁹⁰ Originally, the wind mill was envisioned to house Frankenstein’s lab, which also explains why at the end of the film the monster seeks refuge there, returning to an old familiar place (cf. Behlmer). For a detailed analysis of the expressionist set design of Frankenstein’s tower, see Worland (164).

sound of thunder instead); in fact, except for the title theme, the original version of Universal's *Frankenstein* did not use any score at all. In order to create the film's fantastic settings, almost the entire film was shot on a sound stage, "allowing complete technical manipulation of the environment in the German manner" (57, 160).

Like Universal's *Dracula*, the film was less based on the original Gothic novel (that is, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)), but drew on stage adaptations instead; in this case, on the one by Peggy Webling and Balderston and (indirectly) also on the very first stage adaptation, *Presumption: or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, by Richard Brinsley Peake.⁹¹ Many elements in the Universal film, then, did not originate from Shelley's novel, but were adopted from these stage adaptations; or they were the film's own changes and innovations. Speaking of adaptation, David Punter has identified a conflict within the film: while, on the one hand, Whale's *Frankenstein* wanted to be loyal to the original material, on the other hand, it was also eager to produce an update (cf. 99). In any case, it was Universal's reimagination of *Frankenstein* that definitively shaped the cultural imagination and, consequently, influenced subsequent productions to a considerable extent. Some of the film's distinctive features are particularly noteworthy: for example, in the Universal adaptation, Frankenstein and his monster are presented as instant antagonists. At the same time, the film makes both of them appear quite sympathetic. As a result, the viewer can feel both pity and empathy for the monster. Furthermore, the film features the character of Frankenstein's gnome-like assistant, Fritz, who inspired many subsequent mad-scientist horror films. Another important fact concerning the Universal film is that the monster does not speak, while in Shelley's novel it does. Bereft of its ability to communicate, the monster unavoidably falls victim to misunderstandings. The screenplay, written by Francis Edward Faragoh and Garrett Fort, included further substantial modifications, one of them being the disastrous substitution of a "normal brain" for an "abnormal brain." This gave the story a different direction and twist since the monster's tragedy now no longer resulted from an experiment gone awry, but from a bad body part (cf. Worland 163). Moreover, it dispossessed the monster of a basic innocence, which probably served to justify not only the monster's violent actions but also its torment (cf. Behlmer).

One scene in Universal's *Frankenstein* has sunk particularly deep into the cultural memory: the monster's creation. This scene, in which the monster is brought to life, is also quite different from the corresponding scene in Shelley's novel – and interestingly so. While

⁹¹ Incidentally, "Webling's play was the first version to give the monster the name Frankenstein and call its creator Henry, [stressing] their interchangeable, doppelgänger nature" (Kaye 183). This perhaps added to the common erroneous tendency to associate the name Frankenstein with the monster rather than with its creator.

in the original work Frankenstein is alone with the monster when it comes to life, in the film, the reanimation is witnessed by Dr. Waldman, Elizabeth, and Victor. Thus, while Shelley had envisioned this scene as a private moment in a secluded laboratory, Whale's film turned it into a somewhat public spectacle – which suggests that this was meant as a comment on the film (and on film in general) as spectacle, equating the diegetic spectators with the extra-diegetic ones (that is, the viewers). When Frankenstein sarcastically comments: “Quite a good scene, isn't it? One man crazy; three very sane spectators,” one therefore immediately gets the impression that he is not only addressing the audience in the tower. In this context, another interesting change made in Whale's film needs to be mentioned. In Shelley's novel, Frankenstein is a highly ambitious student, whereas in the Universal film, he is a fully qualified doctor and scientist. Perhaps this is to exacerbate the gravity of the situation: while a student could possibly be forgiven his ambitions more easily, a doctor, by contrast, would most likely have to expect severe consequences.⁹² The electrical pyrotechnics employed in the creation scene, which had a great influence on future adaptations of the story, were developed and implemented by Kenneth Strickfaden. Rudy Behlmer has noted that James Whale considered the creation scene in the tower, which had apparently been inspired by a similar scene from Fritz Lang's German film *Metropolis*, as a crucial one. It was supposed to captivate the audience, to create suspense and make them want to see the rest of the film, and to actually make them believe the creation (cf. Behlmer).

The visualization of the monster's first entrance “was to become a Whale trademark:” first, the monster's scuffling in the hall is heard, which immediately creates suspense; then, the door opens, and the monster walks in backwards; since its face is not yet visible, suspense is increased; then, the monster begins to slowly turn around, shown in “three rapidly tightening close-ups” (Rigby 99). Finally, an almost extreme close-up, which brings the viewer uncomfortably close to the monster's face, reveals its appearance. The monster's eyes were given an especially disturbing and perhaps telling makeup. Karloff had suggested that “his eye lids be heavily caped, giving the creature a look of only partial awareness” (Behlmer). The metal bolts on both sides of the neck, later taken to be inlets for electricity, would also become signature features of the monster. Karloff would reprise his role as

⁹² Unsurprisingly, the lines spoken by Frankenstein upon the successful reanimation of his creation, in which he compares himself to God, were deleted by certain censor groups. They later had to be eliminated altogether, along with several other scenes, when Universal submitted the film to the Production Code Office in 1937 for reissue approval (cf. Behlmer). The scene in which the monster accidentally kills the little girl, Maria, proved to be particularly disturbing. As a consequence, the part where the monster picks her up and throws her into the lake was cut – resulting, however, in a version that was probably far more horrible, as viewers were left to only imagine what might happen next. Interestingly, the version that viewers today are most familiar with, which includes the drowning of the girl, was not restored by Universal until the 1980s (cf. Rigby 99).

Frankenstein's monster again twice. In Universal's highly successful and profitable 1934 follow-up *Bride of Frankenstein*, again directed by Whale, he was not only given a bride, as the title suggests, but also the ability to speak. In 1939, he was literally revived once more, this time by the *Son of Frankenstein*. This, however, would be the last time that Karloff put on his famous costume.

Apart from Universal's *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* – the title characters of which “were perfect metaphors for the Great Depression” (Matthews 6) – the early 1930s gave rise to numerous other horror pictures that henceforth had a share in the shaping of Gothic cinema. The same year that Universal enjoyed great success with its two Gothic horror hits, Paramount Pictures, for example, released *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1931), directed by Rouben Mamoulian. This expressionism-inspired, visually sophisticated film took the visualization of the Jekyll-and-Hyde story to a new level. The film's most impressive achievement was the first transformation sequence, which was accomplished by German-born cinematographer Karl Struss (who had, for example, been involved in Murnau's *Sunrise*). In order to be able to produce the doctor's transformation into his simian alter ego without stopping the camera, red makeup was used for actor Fredric March's face, “then slowly changing from red to blue filters, undetectable in black-and-white photography” (Worland 59).⁹³ Mamoulian wanted this elaborate makeup for Hyde to present him as “a replica of our ancestor, the Neanderthal man that we once were, to show the struggle of modern man with his primeval instincts” (Mamoulian, qtd. in Rigby 103). The year 1932 not only saw the release of an adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, directed by Robert Florey, but also the premiere of the Halperin brothers' *White Zombie*, giving horror cinema its first zombie that was actually referred to as such and thus inaugurating the zombie horror film. Karl Freund's *The Mummy* also premiered in 1932, augmenting the Gothic horror film cast, which now comprised vampires, reanimated corpses, zombies, and mummies, among others. Only one year later, in 1933, Whale directed another important contribution to Gothic cinema: *The Invisible Man*, featuring Claude Rains. This film's visualization of the invisible protagonist would in fact “set the standard for all subsequent invisibility tales” (Worland 59). In addition to these Gothic figures, which were often taken from literary sources, Universal Pictures also came up with its own, equally Gothic creature: the werewolf.⁹⁴ This character,

⁹³ Interestingly, this technique was not used for all of the doctor's transformations. Instead, lap-dissolves were used to visualize the last few ones; a technique that would often be used in later pictures (cf. Rigby 103).

⁹⁴ Many of the werewolf- and similar man-beast films fall into the category of Darwinism-inspired Gothic, which is concerned with man's regression or re-evolution into beast and the beast within man. In post-war years, the theme of a man's (or country's) “descent into bestial violence” obviously “had a clear metaphorical link to the conflagration just past” (Skal, *Monster Show*, 140).

half beast, half man (and thus invoking the Jekyll-and-Hyde theme), entered the Hollywood screen in 1935 with Stuart Walker's *The Werewolf of London*.⁹⁵ However, it was the highly Gothic 1941 hit *The Wolf Man*, Universal's follow-up of its 1935 release, that popularized the werewolf film and inaugurated a whole new (mainstream) horror film branch.

⁹⁵ In fact, the Bison company had already produced a first werewolf film, *The Werewolf* (distributed by Universal), as early as 1913. Unfortunately, however, this film is now lost (cf. Rigby 20).

3. Kingdoms of Shadows: Film and the Gothic – An Excursive Juxtaposition and Play of Thought on an Ideal Match

Gothic, as a genre born in darkness, has a natural affinity with the cinema.

(Heidi Kaye, “Gothic Film”)

Wenn die Zauberkräfte des Schattens und des Doubles auf einem weißen Bildschirm in einem nächtlichen Saal zusammenwirken ... dann öffnen sich für [den Zuschauer] die Schleusen des Mythos, des Traumes, der Magie.

(Edgar Morin)

A touch of witchcraft accompanies the technical challenges of the cinema.

(Victor Stoichita, *The Pygmalion Effect*)

The World is all an optical shadow.

(Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Nouveau Paris*)

In 1896, the Russian writer Maxim Gorky witnessed the first Russian exhibition of the Lumière film program (see chapter 2.3.) at the Nizhni-Novgorod Fair. This novel type of spectacle evidently made a deep impression on Gorky, as his now-famous and often-quoted review of the performance indicates:

Last night I was in the Kingdom of Shadows It is not life but its shadow, it is not motion but its ... spectre It is terrifying to see, but it is the movement of shadows, only of shadows. Curses and ghosts, the evil spirits that have cast entire cities into eternal sleep, come to mind and you feel as though Merlin's vicious trick is being enacted before you You are forgetting where you are. Strange imaginings invade your mind and your consciousness begins to wane and grow dim. (Gorky, qtd. in Leyda, 407-09)

What is particularly striking about Gorky's atmospheric account is that it not only reads like a Gothic text, due to its somewhat Gothic tone and a number of terms that are frequently associated with Gothic fiction (shadows, specters, ghosts, evil spirits); but, more importantly, its specific mode of expression and choice of words allow to make a connection between the Gothic and cinema. That is to say, Gorky's wording hints at certain characteristics that the two seem to have in common, for example, both are “kingdoms of shadows.” The quote thus lends itself perfectly as an introduction to a chapter that is concerned precisely with the parallels or overlaps between the Gothic and film.⁹⁶

The previous chapters have shown that there has always been a strong affinity and reciprocal, even symbiotic, relationship between the Gothic and techno-visual media

⁹⁶ I would like to emphasize that when talking about “film” in this chapter, I either mean film (excluding animated film) as it is conventionally projected onto a screen in a movie theater or film as a synonym for the film medium. I am well aware that I am employing the terms “film” or “film medium” rather loosely; however, I believe that my use of the terms is always clear (from the context) and thus acceptable.

spectacles. On the one hand, the Gothic with its highly visual character and fantastic elements was virtually predestined for application by the visual media and has always lent itself to them – and to film, in particular – with their ever evolving and increasing repertoire of technical possibilities. Thus, from the beginning, the Gothic has allowed filmmakers to explore and exhibit the medium's potential. On the other hand – besides the fact that the visual media have always had a strong influence on Gothic literature (especially on the diegetic level, forms of visual spectacle adding to the uncanny and mysterious tones of the stories) – film as a visual medium par excellence has always presented a highly effective (and affective) medium for the (visualization of the) Gothic. Since the emergence of the film medium in the late nineteenth century, then, a great many filmmakers and producers of motion pictures, like other showmen before them, have turned to the Gothic for their spectacles, and the Gothic has thus been an integral part of the world of cinema from the outset.

With this perpetual affiliation in mind, it is now interesting to take a closer look at both film and the Gothic to see what characteristics they share or in what ways they overlap. To investigate this, a phenomenological approach is of great use; that is, the nature of film and the nature of the Gothic shall be examined. Juxtaposing the two, many connections and coinciding features are instantly salient, which not only shows that film and the Gothic seem to be a perfect match, but also that film is both a highly effective and probably the ideal medium for the (visualization of the) Gothic.

Spectrality: Gothic Specters and Film's Phantasmal Nature

One of the notions or features that probably spring to mind first when reflecting about connections between the Gothic and film is that of "spectrality." Regarding the nature of film (projection), it is evident that, simply speaking, film merely consists of light. Or as Germaine Dulac wrote in an early film-theoretical essay in 1925, film – which is in fact made up of a series of photographic images (photography literally meaning "writing light" (Mirzoeff 65)) – consists of "moving, changing, merging light"; in fact, it is "nothing but light" that is projected onto a usually white screen in a dark room (237; my translation).⁹⁷ This becomes quite obvious if one disrupts the projector's beam of light, for example, by holding an object in front of the lens: the object's shadow will then appear on the screen, partly blocking out the originally projected image. The images that one sees on the screen, including the characters and objects they depict, are therefore immaterial. Technically, they are nothing but an optical

⁹⁷ This observation still holds true and will continue to do so as long as motion pictures (whatever form they might take) are made visible by means of projection.

illusion (two-dimensional images that appear as three-dimensional); to some extent comparable to such tricks played on the mind as hallucinations or phantasmagoric imagery or phantoms, when “we take artificially produced effects of light and shadow for apparitions, or see figures in moving draperies” (Castle 160). In other words, although one sees and seems to be confronted with corporeal environments, objects, and even living beings on the cinematic screen, in fact, physically, there is nothing there; whatever is projected onto the screen is in absence of a body.⁹⁸ Film therefore “crosses the boundaries between the corporeal and the spectral,” as Stacey Abbott has noted (15).⁹⁹

As a result of the images’ disembodied state, they assume a somewhat ghostly character; director Robert Wiene described this as “the irreality, the ghostliness of the film image” (qtd. in Tybjerg, 34). Over the years, many film scholars have noted this ghostly quality of film. Hugo Münsterberg, for example, wrote that “uncanny ghosts appear from nothing and disappear into nothing” (28). Jeffrey Sconce has observed (with regard to television, but the same is also true for cinema) that “we can see another vision of beings who, like ghosts ... are no longer anchored in reality but instead wander through a hallucinatory world of eternal simulation where the material real is forever lost” (19). And Gilberto Pérez has even argued that the cinematic image is “the true hallucination, the material ghost” (28).¹⁰⁰ Due to its phantasmal character, “its essential spectrality ... and eerie ‘ontology’” (Royle 81), and its great illusionary potential, then, film seems particularly apt to evoke and show the disembodied, ghostly, translucent or spectral, and supernatural (as well as the frequently psychologically-generated, as we will see later) figures and phantoms of the Gothic.¹⁰¹ One could probably even go so far as to call film itself a ghost or, at least, a phantasmal apparition.

⁹⁸ I would like to emphasize that I am by no means suggesting that the viewers of a film fall for (or are even frightened by) the illusion in that they mistake it for reality; the common viewer is quite aware of what film is. I am merely discussing film’s technical similarities to different kinds of illusionistic visual effects.

⁹⁹ In her essay on “Spectral Vampires,” Abbott makes an interesting connection between the film medium and the vampire, one of the main members of the Gothic cast, claiming that many of their respective qualities, such as the sensitivity towards sunlight, overlap. She therefore contends that film is particularly apt to show the supernatural powers of the vampire (cf. 15-16). She also notes how by means of dissolves or superimpositions the film *Nosferatu* presents the vampire Orlok as an “ethereal being” (19).

¹⁰⁰ In this connection, it is interesting to consider a remark by Jean Epstein, who actually regarded the cinema as “essentially supernatural” because “everything is transformed” (qtd. in Stam, *Film Theory*, 35).

¹⁰¹ Although phantasmagoric projections in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which were also made of light, functioned similarly, they did not have the photographically realistic quality that film has always had. Film can thus position spectral figures in realistic settings and thereby enhance their uncanniness.

Since it is by means of an interplay between light and dark that the moving images on the cinematic screen are created, film has often been referred to as a “shadowplay.” Even Gorky described the projection show he attended as “the Kingdom of Shadows” and the film itself as “the movement of shadows, only shadows.” Film and the cinema thus appear to be the ideal medium and venue, respectively, for the Gothic, which is itself a kingdom of (moving) shadows: that is, shadows and the interplay between light and dark have also always been central to the Gothic; not only literally as visual formations (actual shadowplays or chiaroscuro effects, often invoking film), but also figuratively as the battle between good and evil.¹⁰² In fact, Gothic texts, in their various forms, have always tended to combine these two kinds of interplays; for example, in that shadows embody, represent, or are associated with evil (the villain) and the uncanny, while the good (the hero) is connected with or represented by light. Analogously, sinister occurrences frequently take place in dark, gloomy, or shady settings, while positive or positively connoted scenes are rather set in light and thus apparently peaceful venues.¹⁰³ The Gothic uncanny also often literally overshadows light or happy scenes. In her book *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror, and the Primal Uncanny*, Barbara Creed provides an illustrative example: whenever the monster in Whale’s *Frankenstein* (see chapter 2.4.2.) appears and casts its ominous shadow on a scene, she argues, the “happy mood is suddenly filled with darkness and despair”; “the familiar becomes unfamiliar and the scene fills with a sense of uncanny disquiet” (53).

What makes film a particularly effective (and affective) medium for the Gothic in this respect is its potential to depict and play out the shadowplays of eerie dark scenes, especially with today’s technologies – the fact that the viewers are sitting in and watching from the darkness of the auditorium is obviously also quite conducive here. For example, presenting different shades of darkness, just as one would perceive them in reality, film to some extent allows the viewer to see in the dark (during a scene, the screen is seldom pitch-black). This per se already creates a particularly tense atmosphere, as situations are usually experienced quite differently if they take place in the dark rather than in the light, that is, they easily

¹⁰² On a related note, it is interesting to consider that in the movie theater, one actually needs the darkness to be able to see the light projections, and, in turn, one needs their light to be able to see at all. In other words, light and dark are mutually dependent (on the general interdependence of light and dark, see Hegel quoted in Stoichita, *Short History*, 8). In a sense, the same is also true for the Gothic: here too, light (good) and dark (evil) go hand in hand; one is needed to verify or determine the other.

¹⁰³ Although to connect good with light and evil with dark is quite conventional, these connections play a particularly dominant role in Gothic texts, where the contrast between light and dark and good and evil, respectively, is quite clear-cut. Binary oppositions in general (past-present, death-life, sin-innocence, etc.) have always been of central importance for the Gothic. Moreover, the Gothic has always availed itself of clichés.

become uncanny. As Royle has observed, the uncanny “comes above all, perhaps, in the *uncertainties* of silence, solitude and *darkness*” (2; my emphases).¹⁰⁴ Moreover, this ability to see in the dark – but only partially! – engages the audience, everyone for him- or herself, to try to make out as much as possible. In Gothic film, however, there are always things that are withheld from view, that remain in the shadows and thus unrecognized, keeping the viewer himself “in the dark.”¹⁰⁵ That way (and as a result of the viewer’s heightened viewing effort), suspense is increased, which can then be resolved in two ways: either the viewer still does not get to see what is obscured by the dark and a sense of mysterious obscurity remains, making the sublime effect of a scene all the more intensive (cf. Burke, chapter 2.1.), or something that “ought to have remained secret and hidden” suddenly appears out of the dark and thus “[comes] to light,” which is precisely how Freud (following Schelling) defined the uncanny (Royle 108; cf. Freud 235). As Kavka has noted, in Gothic film the dialectic between seeing and not seeing is thus in fact “part of the structure of visualization itself – the shadow-play of the Gothic”; in other words, “Gothic film adds its own media-specific element” (227).

Another interesting aspect concerning shadows is that they evoke the dialectic of presence and absence – which points to another overlap between the Gothic (shadow) and film (as shadowplay), as both draw or rely on this dialectic in one way or another. Generally speaking, the shadowplay of the screen, which consists in objects made present through projection, per se always already implies absence because whatever appears on the screen is obviously not really (physically) there; the (moment of) presence of what is shown already belongs to the past when it was recorded. The images on the screen, then, are nothing but a “Präsenz-Effekt” (presence effect), that is, a past made present again (Bronfen, “Vergegenwärtigung,” my translation). Roland Barthes referred to this as the “ça-a-été,” which translates as “that has been” (cf. chapter 32 in Barthes). It must have been a similar idea that passed through Gorky’s mind when he, quite appalled, noted that “[it] is not life but its shadow” that one sees on the screen. In this context, Stanley Cavell’s “discovery” of “a fundamental fact of film’s photographic basis” (xvi) is also interesting to consider: “objects participate in the photographic presence of themselves; they participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearances. Objects projected on a screen are inherently reflexive, they occur as self-referential, reflecting upon their

¹⁰⁴ For a detailed discussion of the connection between darkness and the uncanny, see chapter 7 in Royle’s book *The Uncanny: An Introduction*.

¹⁰⁵ According to Kavka, this is precisely what distinguishes Gothic film: in contrast to the horror film, which shows it all and “demands that we see,” Gothic film frequently deprives the viewer, who wants to see, of sight by means of its shadowplay; that is, things are hidden in the shadows (227).

physical origins. Their presence refers to their absence, their location in another place.” In other words, as he writes a few pages later, “we see things that are not present” (18).

The Gothic has also always availed itself of the play with presence and absence, mostly to create spine-tingling effects and to evoke an uncanny atmosphere and a sense of foreboding. Numerous stories deal with apparent hauntings (something seems to be present, but is not) or cases of ventriloquism (a voice is heard, but its source remains a mystery), for example. In this respect, the (suddenly appearing or lurking) shadow, which has always been a staple ingredient of Gothic fiction, especially of film, is of particular interest and significance: a shadow always implies a presence, as someone or something must be there to whom the shadow belongs; but it simultaneously also points to the absence of whatever or whoever is casting the shadow in that it is after all only a shadow that one sees.¹⁰⁶ This visual phenomenon can be quite uncanny and sublime in the Burkean sense because it creates a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity, especially since shadows are often obscure. Moreover, the eerily lurking shadow of an otherwise absent being often evokes a sense of threatening or haunting presence (the more so if only the shadow is visible on the screen and its source does not come in sight), which – thanks to the powers of our imagination – is then by far more terrifying than the actual (monstrous) appearance would probably be. It is also worth mentioning that depending on the angle of the projection surface and the distance of the light source, the shadow-projection of an object can vary in size and be subject to distortion, as a result of which shadows often assume a somewhat “monstrous” shape, which then seems to literally over-*shadow* the scene – obviously, it is quite tempting to once again draw a parallel to the Gothic silver screen here, which also becomes a site of uncanny projections.

In the context of this presence-absence dialectic, it is interesting to consider that a shadow, as a space of neither total light nor total darkness (that is, shadows need light to exist, and whenever there is light, shadows, as a form of darkness, are produced as a natural result), always represents an “in-between-ness.” It is for this reason that shadows have often been used – as has frequently been the case in Gothic fiction, with its penchant for the transgression of boundaries – to indicate an intermediate state: not only between light/dark or presence/absence, but also between consciousness/the unconscious, knowledge/ignorance, reality/dream or illusion, self/other, and so on. It comes as no surprise, then, that from the beginning, Gothic cinema, with its enormous visual potential, has continuously availed itself

¹⁰⁶ On a more abstract level, the shadow in Gothic texts can also be read as a symbol for the absence of rationality or knowledge or a lack or loss of innocence, often signified by an absence of light (or *enlightenment*), again both in the literal and metaphorical sense. Shadows and darkness, then, stand for the irrational, the mysterious, and the unexplainable or unspeakable, producing dark and evil forces (literally *overshadowing* *enlightened* views).

of all kinds of lurking, absorbing, or consuming shadows. The shadow of the vampire Orlok in Murnau's *Nosferatu*, for instance, has long become famous, as has Jacques Tourneur's powerful cinema of shadows (see chapter 4); memorable examples that nicely show how the Gothic (on screen) has always thrived on precisely such ambivalences and indeterminacies as embodied by the shadow.

Doubles: Gothic Doppelgänger and the Screen as a Medium of Uncanny Doublings

The shadow, the “obvious [analogue] of the body, its immaterial [double]” (Dolar 12), of course immediately calls to mind the figure of the *Doppelgänger* – especially within the context of a juxtaposition of film and the Gothic. The *Doppelgänger*, a doubling of the self and thus “other” to it, which usually finds expression in bilocal forms, such as shadow doubles, mirror images, or portraits, has always been a staple member of the Gothic cast, especially since the emergence of psychoanalysis in the late nineteenth century.¹⁰⁷ Like the film image, this sinister fellow, to which Freud ascribed an “extraordinarily high degree of uncanniness” (248; my translation), also constitutes presence and absence at the same time: presence because obviously the double itself is present (and present to the self), and absence because the double is detached (or absent) from the self. As a (detached, other) part of the self, it is thus simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar to the original self, which, following Freud, makes up its uncanny nature. In a Lacanian analysis of the double, Dolar has stated that “I cannot recognize myself [in another form] and at the same time be one with myself” (12). The realization of a split self, therefore, must be uncanny since it deeply disturbs one's sense of oneself; or as Royle has put it, “one's sense of oneself . . . [suddenly] seems strangely questionable” (Royle 1). Consequently, the double typically signifies a confusion or disturbance of the self as it is confronted with something alien coming from within (cf. Freud 248). Given shape in popular Gothic works such as Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Poe's “William Wilson” (1839), Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), or Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), to name but a few, stories of doubles thus frequently revolve around the dual nature of man as a constant struggle between good and evil. They are about “a blurring of boundaries

¹⁰⁷ Victor Stoichita has noted that in the seventeenth century already the shadow was internalized “as a personal projection and as an ‘obscure’ area of the soul, where inner negativity is born;” it was regarded as an “‘imaginary enemy.’” He has further pointed out that the shadow “is, in a way, the emblem of negative reduplication” (*Short History*, 139) and that to turn against or to kill one's own shadow always involves self-destruction (cf. 140).

between self and other, to the extent that the other becomes a version of the self returned ... in the form of hostility” (Kavka 210).

As early as 1924, Béla Balázs pointed out in his book *Der Sichtbare Mensch* (*The Visible Man*), one of the earliest books on film theory, that film in general has a particular technical potential to display doubles or Doppelgänger, which due to the “visible resemblance” obtain a thrilling reality that no literature can produce (Balázs 42-43; my translation). Interestingly, however, film is not only a particularly effective medium for the uncanny presentation of Gothic doubles, but it is also in the nature of film itself that it automatically produces doubles (cf. the discussion of the presence-absence dialectic above); in other words, film is “in its essence a world of doubles” (Royle 78). The on-screen projections of actors – their shadows, so to speak – for example, are naturally always only “copies” of their real persons. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes therefore uses the term *eidolon* (meaning unsubstantial image, phantom, or apparition in Greek) to refer to the referent in a photographic (or, by extension, cinematic) image. These immaterial bodies of actors are merely “copies” of selves which at this particular moment of the screening already belong to the past. Like the Gothic double, the images on screen are also detached from their “original;” which is why films featuring doubles, such as Wegener’s *Der Student von Prag* (see chapter 2.3.)¹⁰⁸, can be read as a “metacinematic reflection on film’s moving images that can be detached from their ‘original’ to assume a life of their own” (Andriopoulos 162).

Reanimation: The Gothic Return of the Dead and Film as a (Pseudo-)Necromantic Medium

With film’s ability to *re-present* objects (in the sense of making them present again) in mind, another feature of film now becomes apparent, which again allows to link it with the Gothic: film can be regarded as a “necromantic medium” since it is not only able to “[preserve] life on dead surfaces” (Botting, “Reading Machines,” 11th par.), but can also evoke or bring back the dead, so to speak – an issue with which the Gothic is largely concerned, which frequently deals with the hauntings of the past and the return of the dead (ghosts or vampires being typical representatives). For example, film as a necromantic medium can, in a way, simply revive deceased actresses and actors on screen and thus reanimate them; which gives new meaning to Stoichita’s observation that a “star is both being and appearance, a living person and a phantom” (*Pygmalion*, 190). As Barthes noted in

¹⁰⁸ In *Der Student von Prag*, a twofold doubling actually takes place: on the one hand, the actor Paul Wegener is doubled, resulting in his on-screen presence; on the other hand, the character he plays, Balduin, is also doubled (by means of superimposition), resulting in an uncanny Doppelgänger.

“Rhetoric of the Image,” the (cinematic) image is “re-presentation, which is to say ultimately *resurrection*” (33; my emphasis).¹⁰⁹ Thus, film stars – or in Gothic terms their ghostly doubles – can (repeatedly and endlessly) *return* via film; their live images are preserved – their images being their “protection against death” (Dolar 12) – and they, so to speak, “live on.”¹¹⁰ Along the same lines, Warner has argued that “in the movies, images live and move exactly as they did when they were alive: the copy here has become somehow more than a copy. It partakes of the living nature of its original, and continues to be present and animate when they are not there, and indeed, to survive long after they are dead” (18). In Browning’s *Dracula*, for example, it is the famous actor Bela Lugosi who is brought back to life, and thus continues to haunt, with every screening of the movie;¹¹¹ likewise, every time Whale’s *Frankenstein* is screened, it allows Hollywood icon Boris Karloff to return from the dead – in more than one way. Regarding film as a necromantic medium that evidently blurs the lines between the realms of life and death, then, another claim by Barthes is worth considering, namely that the return of the dead is already immanent in every photo per se (and, by extension, in film as well), giving it an “uncanny overtone/connotation” (17; my translation). Along the same lines, Susan Sontag has noted that “[all] photographs are *memento mori*,” that is, they remind one of one’s own mortality. To take a picture of someone (or to capture someone on film, for that matter) “is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs [or films] testify to time’s relentless melt” (15).

Miles and others have contended that in “the post-Enlightenment world,” which lacks “a belief in an afterlife to house the dead,” “the dead persist;” they “live again, as a spectral presence” (Miles, 7th par.). It seems that the cinema, at least in the case of film stars that have passed away, is the place where this is literally true. Not for nothing has Castle (quoting a poet from the *Gentleman’s Magazine* of 1802) called movie theaters “dark rooms, where spectres from the dead they raise” (141). In the cinema, images are thus brought (back) to life via the interplay between light and dark, or the shadowplay, of the screen. The images *return* on the screen; or as Miles has put it, they “rise again, as phantasmagoria” – just like ghostly apparitions or phantoms are brought to life or return to haunt in Gothic tales of terror. In this

¹⁰⁹ In this context, it is interesting to reflect upon the fact that many Gothic horror films are adaptations, and obviously, an adaptation could always be regarded as a kind of “resurrection” of the original work.

¹¹⁰ Here, the following notes on the double by Freud are interesting to consider: a doubling or duplication – and, as aforementioned, this is precisely what film is: a doubling of a past reality, of persons, objects, etc. – is created to avoid destruction (cf. 247); film’s doubles are saved from destruction by being captured on celluloid.

¹¹¹ In the case of the vampire, the resurrection on screen obviously opens up innumerable possibilities of drawing analogies between the nature of the vampire as undead and the spectral or vampiric technology of the film medium (cf. Abbott, Bronfen’s “Das Kino als Vampir,” or Kaes, for example). Even Gorky already regarded cinema itself as “a technological vampire that promised a kind of living death” (Skal 5).

regard, the term “medium” of course immediately also conjures up the idea of a spiritual medium; that is, an agent that – just like film – is able to establish communication and thus transgress the boundaries between the past and the present or the realm of the dead and that of the living, for example.¹¹² Interestingly, Kavka has argued that it is precisely “in the other sense of ‘medium’,” that is, as a kind of spiritual medium, that “film in the Gothic mode must be understood”. It “should thus not be thought of as a medium of representation, but as a medium through which things are allowed to pass, from the past into the present, from death into life, from the beyond to here and back again ... Like a living medium who calls up spirits from the ‘other side,’ the film screen allows uncanny presences to ‘pass through’ it” (228).

“Hirn-Gespinnste”: The Return of the Repressed and the Haunted Screen
(*Film’s Great Illusionary Potential*)

In connection with the return of the dead and the return of the past, one also has to consider the Gothic’s distinctive preoccupation with the mind or psyche that is haunted by the return of the repressed; that is, the re-emergence of previously rejected memories, impulses, fantasies, and the like to one’s consciousness – things that one would (if unconsciously) rather forget and not be confronted with again. Past transgressions, such as crimes or other wrongdoings, at times committed not even by the present generation, but by its ancestors (the sins of the fathers), revisit and torment the (guilty) psyche just as much as unspeakable desires or traumas. Among the most frequent forms in Gothic texts to represent the return of the repressed, besides doubles, have been uncanny phantasmagoric delusions, such as specters of the dead, or nightmares. In Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher,” for example, the protagonist, Roderick Usher, is haunted by the return of the repressed – he buried his sister alive – in the form of his sister’s ghostly appearance (see chapter 2.4.1.). And in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein, who has just finished and reanimated his monstrous creation, is haunted by a nightmare, which clearly reflects his guilty conscience (cf. Shelley 59; see chapter 2.4.2.).

From the beginning, in part due to its particular textural nature, film has been regarded by many (not only by film theorists) as a medium that has an extraordinary potency to depict psychological processes and states, such as delusions, dreams/nightmares, or mental

¹¹² According to Warner, “[the] word ‘medium’ was extended to include individuals in 1854, a telling date, since the Spiritualist movement had begun around ten years before that” (17). Spiritualism, a movement centering on the belief that communication with the dead is possible through a so-called medium (in séances, for example), flourished in both the United States and Europe from the 1840s onwards.

confusion, therefore making it a particularly apt medium for the visualization of the Gothic psyche. Psychoanalyst Otto Rank (author of *Der Doppelgänger*, 1914), for example, claimed that cinematic representation, which in his view was reminiscent of dream technique in many respects,¹¹³ could visualize mental conditions particularly well (cf. 7-8, 12). One cinematic technique that has always proved to be especially useful and effective in this regard and has thus enjoyed great popularity among filmmakers is that of superimposing two images, sometimes creating a somewhat blurred or nebulous image. In Gothic cinema, superimpositions have frequently been used to visualize not only phantoms or doubles (incidentally, it was the double in *Der Student von Prag*, which was created through double exposure or superimposition, that prompted Rank to write his study), but also dreams – or nightmares, for that matter – with their often diffused nature (the images looking as if they were covered by a veil, to use a popular Gothic trope), for example.

Film's generally dream-like nature and oneiric quality, in particular, have been an issue in many scholarly writings since the dawn of cinema.¹¹⁴ Bruce Kavin, for example, has specified some of “the elementary ways in which films are like dreams”: in his view, “[watching] a film and having a dream are both passive and active events.” Both dreamer and audience are “physically cushioned in a darkened room, most of [their] movements restricted to slight shifts of position in a bed or chair, and mentally in various degrees of alertness, watching a visual process that often tells a story and often masks/presents some type of thought. In both cases,” he continues, “the eyes move and the mind exercises creative attention” (“Mummy’s Pool,” 3-4). In this connection, Kavin’s notion of the “mindscreen,” which links the visual fields of mind and film screen, is particularly intriguing – it also plays an important role in many of the Gothic films discussed in Part II. He defines it as follows: “[a] mindscreen presents the landscape of the mind’s eye, much as subjective camera presents what is seen by the physical eye.” Kavin clearly differentiates between mindscreen and dream sequence, the latter being only one example of the former: “[there] are many instances in which the contents of a character’s mind are displayed on the movie screen (or in which the movie screen behaves *like* a mind) and not all of them are intended to approximate dreams” (*How Movies Work*, 74).

¹¹³ Along the same lines, Münsterberg stated that in film “[every] dream becomes real” (28). It comes as no surprise, then, that Hollywood’s movie industry is often referred to as the “dream factory.”

¹¹⁴ Among those who have noted and dealt with the analogy between film and dreams (or used the dream metaphor for film) are Suzanne Langer, André Breton, Jean Epstein, Roland Barthes, Edgar Morin, or Christian Metz, to name but a few. Unfortunately, it would go beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss their observations. It should also be noted that most approaches on the film-dream analogy are based on Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899).

Media scholar Werner Faulstich has also provided an interesting approach to the film-dream analogy. Analogous to Christian Metz, who described the cinematic experience as “a kind of sleep,” “a lapse into dreaming” (102-03),¹¹⁵ Faulstich has argued that watching a film in the cinema in general is like a collective dream dreamt by the audience. At the same time, film – which curiously enough, being a visual medium, has always made recourse to “the invisible, the hidden, the repressed” (“the representation of fantasies, utopias, dreams ... [pointing to] latency as the actual semantic level of film”) – takes each viewer on an “expedition into the self,” one’s “own unconscious” (*Medienwandel*, 250; my translation). Through identification and individual (unconscious) interpretation, every viewer makes the film his or her own personal dream (cf. *Grundkurs*, 23).¹¹⁶ Interestingly, like in a dream, film images (thanks to editing and other techniques) can also appear in arbitrary arrangements and do not need to adhere to laws of time, space, realism, or rationalism. Moreover, film generally has the power to affect viewers in a similar way in which a dream could affect them: the emotions evoked during the screening often make a lasting impression and continue to have an effect on the viewers.

In conclusion, then, the silver screen generally becomes or functions as the site of psychological projections, a mindscreen; both on a diegetic level, representing a character’s “‘narrating’ mind” (Kawin, “Mummy’s Pool,” 4), and on an extradiegetic level, representing the viewer’s psyche. It obviously also suggests itself, then, to draw a parallel between the troubled mind or psyche as an important Gothic trope and the Gothic silver screen with its flickering, nightmarish images, which both become sites of haunting projections as the repressed returns. Put another way, psychological hauntings (including those of the audience) – or to use the very apt German expression “Hirn-Gespinnste” (that is, the ghosts of the mind) – are brought to life and are mediated by the phantasmagoric images on the Gothic screen; as Kawin has put it, “[one] goes to a horror film in order to have a nightmare,” “[horror] films [functioning] as nightmares” and thus catering to one’s “cathartic masochism” (4, 5, 12). The shadowplay of the screen, then, becomes the analogue of the shadowplay of the mind.¹¹⁷ Or as Botting, following Kittler, has put it: “cinema renders the unconscious visible” (“Reading Machines,” 13th par.). All things considered, the film medium thus evidently has a

¹¹⁵ Metz also discusses the notion of “perceptual transference,” that is, “the dream-like and sleepy confusion of film and reality” as a result of the passive and silent viewer’s absorption by the film’s diegesis (103).

¹¹⁶ It is important to point out, as Metz and others have noted, that while the dreamer is usually unaware that he or she is dreaming (dream being the “true illusion”), the film viewer commonly knows exactly that he or she is watching a film (cf. 101, 104, 107).

¹¹⁷ Incidentally, for the Greeks, the shadow was once a metaphor for the psyche or soul (cf. Stoichita, interview, and Warner 15).

psychological dimension to it, which eminently enables it to visualize the psychological phenomena, elements, and overtones of the Gothic.

The Sublime: The Gothic Sublime and the Sublime Screen

The previous sections have shown that in many respects, then, the Gothic screen becomes or functions as a site of the sublime – one of the Gothic’s key components – which first and foremost appeals to the sense of sight (see chapter 2.1.), making film as a visual medium par excellence an ideal conveyor. Awe-inspiring or (delightfully) terrifying images springing from the diegesis of the Gothic film appear before the viewers’ eyes and infuse them with a sense of horror and uncanny suspense, resulting in an extraordinary visual experience. There are many reasons why the film screen lends itself perfectly to the visualization of the Gothic sublime. To begin with, the sheer size of the cinematic screen gives it a sublime quality. The showing of a vast landscape, for example, especially when aided by widescreen formats such as CinemaScope or Panavision – not to mention today’s IMAX format – allows for a sublime visual experience quite similar to that which one would experience in real nature, such as a view over the Alps from a mountain top or a view of the seemingly infinite ocean from the shore.¹¹⁸ Although in the movie theater one is not (yet) able to “feel” one’s cinematic environment (such as the wind), which probably enhances the sublime sensation in natural surroundings, one still experiences the same emotions of grandeur and awe and the same sense of one’s own limitations, which can be overwhelming in both a positive and negative sense. As Balázs already observed in his day, no other art is able to exert “the pathos of magnitudes” the way film can (cf. 53; my translation).¹¹⁹ The larger-than-life size of the cinematic screen thus also heightens the effect of particular settings – Roger Corman’s extraordinary use and exploitation of widescreen formats, discussed in chapter 5, is particularly intriguing in this respect – not to mention the effect of monstrous appearances. Dark woods or similarly labyrinthine places, such as subterranean vaults or suburban streetscapes, for example, or a haunted castle or mansion can assume overwhelming dimensions on screen, leaving the viewer with a sense of awe and terror (especially when the settings are dark and obscure). This also has to do with the viewer’s position in the (dark)

¹¹⁸ Interestingly, in his book *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (*Civilization and Its Discontents*, 1930), Freud mentioned the notion “ozeanisches Gefühl” (oceanic feeling; 31), coined by Romain Rolland, which describes a feeling of infinity and limitlessness and thus seems somewhat reminiscent of the sublime.

¹¹⁹ Münsterberg also noted that film, due to its (photographic) depth, was highly effective in intensifying the effectualness (“Wirkungskraft”) of landscapes, for example (cf. 53-54).

auditorium (see above): according to Paul Coats, “the screen that towers above us enforces the low-angle ... perspective of the sublime” (34).

Because of its size, the big screen in a way absorbs the viewers into the action, which additionally heightens the effect of the sublime visual experience. Yet, the viewers never really come close, but always remain watching from a distance because the screen produces a distance between what is viewed and the viewer. It thus “screens” in both senses of the word: it shows or displays, but it simultaneously also “screens” in the sense of shielding; that is, it produces a safe distance, which Burke regarded as one of the necessary prerequisites in order to be able to experience “delight” in the face of sublime terror (see chapter 2.1.). After all, it is “by the effects of distance” that “the threat of violence is mitigated” (Shaw 6). The silver screen thus allows viewers to experience the thrills of Gothic cinema safely, thereby making it possible for these films to be enjoyable events in the first place.¹²⁰

The fact that despite its enormous size the screen is yet actually limited and the “succession of automatic world projections” (Cavell 146) it displays provides only a fragment of the world does not quite matter; this is simply, usually unconsciously, ignored. Just like in the photograph, where one tends to pay attention to and become absorbed by what is shown only – that is, the referent, the *eidolon*, or the *spectrum* – and not to the photograph per se with its frame, as Barthes suggested (cf. *Helle Kammer*, 14), one is not bothered by the fact that one never sees the world in its entirety. Naturally, we are used to a very similar type of view anyway, as eyesight itself, reduced to a horizontal angle of about 170°, always allows one to perceive only a fragment or an excerpt of the world. Interestingly, “[c]inematic representation depends on our acceptance of absence,” as Pérez has noted, that is, “the absence of most of the world from each image on the screen;” in other words, we have to accept that what we see on the screen is only a fragment of the world (25). What makes the limits of the screen particularly interesting, especially with regard to Gothic cinema, however, is the fact that there will always be something that remains off-screen, that is, outside the frame, and thus out of sight. The Gothic sublime, as a form of excess, per se implies the transgression of bounds and limitations – or frames, for that matter; as such, it “marks the limits of reason and expression together with a sense of what might lie beyond these limits” (Shaw 2). Consequently, the bounds of the film screen seem to be quite conducive to the presentation of the sublime.

Gothic filmmakers have always turned this into a highly effective tool in that they have, for example, withheld sights from the audience to evoke sublime terror. Thus, viewers

¹²⁰ Of course, there is also the general fact that reproduced “images separate the viewer from the viewed by a discontinuity in the relations between time and space” (Evans 16).

can, for instance, frequently already hear something (sound – or in some cases its absence – being of essential importance and adding to the sublime experience in the Gothic horror film), but not see it; which, depending on what they hear, can be quite uncanny as it evokes a sense of foreboding. This is always aided by the fact that the camera directs the viewers' eyes; that is to say, even if they are actively following the action on screen, trying to make out as much as possible, they are nevertheless only passive consumers of the (at times deliberately depriving and selective) images presented to them and therefore helplessly at the mercy of the filmmaker. As a result, suspense is increased and the viewers' tension heightened – obviously a highly effective strategy for Gothic cinema. In this connection, Kavka's notion of the "speaking from the 'beyond'," which, as she claims, is always central to the Gothic, is of particular interest (226). On the one hand, it implies the connection to another world, a place that lies beyond the one we are confronted with or present at (for example, the past, or cinematically-speaking, the off-screen). On the other hand, it also implies that someone or something from that place, whom or which we do not see (something being shadowed or off-screen in her view constituting a crucial feature of Gothic film (cf. 227)), "speaks" to us. As Cavell put it, "our access to another world is normally through voices from it," that is, through voices from the "beyond" we gain access to it (18); which is probably one of the most sublime ideas.

There are, of course, many more correspondences and overlaps between the Gothic and film worthy of discussion. Since a more detailed analysis would go beyond the scope of this chapter, however, it shall suffice to only touch on some of the most conspicuous aspects. In other words, the presented play of thought is not intended to be exhaustive, but shall rather serve as an inspiration and encourage further reflection. Part II of this volume, which looks at a number of (very different) Gothic films in detail, will further make clear why film and the Gothic go so well together, and why film is not only a particularly effective and affective, but probably *the* ideal medium for the (visualization of) the Gothic.

4. The (Early) 1940s and Jacques Tourneur's Cinema of Shadows

Wo Schatten sind, muss Licht sein. Und wo Licht herrscht, muss es Dunkelheit geben, denn wie sonst könnten sich Schatten und Gestalten abzeichnen. Und überall, wo sich Licht und Dunkel auf jene sonderbare Art mischen, dass weder Dunkel noch Licht ist, herrscht ein Dazwischen, das wir Dämmerung oder Zwielflicht nennen. Im Zwielflicht werden die vertrauten Gegenstände uns fremd, ihre Gestalt scheint sich aufzulösen oder andere, uns geheimnisvoll dünkende Formen anzunehmen.

(Willi Karow)

If you make the screen dark enough, the mind's eye will read anything into it you want!

(Val Lewton)

In the first half of the 1940s, Hollywood, like the rest of the world, was overshadowed by the horrors of World War II, which the United States entered on 7 December 1941 in response to the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor. It is hardly surprising that in the face of real horrors movie audiences were palpably less interested in artificially produced ones, and accordingly, the studios released only a relatively small number of (Gothic) horror films during this time.¹²¹ In general, the 1940s saw a leaning towards more realistic films (dramas, patriotic films, and propaganda films), reflected in motion pictures such as RKO's *Citizen Kane* (1941) or the immensely successful *Casablanca* (1942). Moreover, "a new mood of cynicism, pessimism, and darkness" had become noticeable in the American cinema (especially in crime- and psychological thrillers, but also in melodramas) from the late 1930s on (Schrader 229). This new tendency in fact heralded the emergence of what French critics in 1946 would retrospectively label *film noir* (cf. 228); a new kind of film art and style, symptomatic of the time, which then had its heyday in the 1940s and early 1950s.¹²² These films, which were concerned with moral degeneracy, crime, and corruption, were often set in dark urban spaces. Besides the lone and somewhat alienated (anti-)hero, such as a detective or private eye, they sometimes featured a "femme fatale" who would cause trouble, usually destroying the hero. Noir films often drew on the low-key chiaroscuro visual styles of German Expressionism to evoke their characteristic tone and to create a feeling of alienation, claustrophobia, and entrapment. As Steven Shaviro has observed, "[in] film noir (as in German expressionism

¹²¹ Another reason for the studios' low output was that the foreign market for American motion pictures had decreased as well. Great Britain, for example, had (unofficially) barred all horror films because of the ongoing war (cf. Skal 218). In 1937, the BBFC introduced the censoring "H" (for horrific) certificate (cf. Rigby 172). This affected the American horror film considerably, which was also subject to heavy censorship at home (cf. Worland 11).

¹²² Incidentally, no less a person than Tourneur later also made a seminal contribution to film noir: *Out of the Past* (1947).

before it), light and shadow are projections of an intense subjectivity, violently at war with itself” (1). Over the years, these films would grow increasingly darker and fatalistic.

Among those Gothic horror films that did make it onto the screen in the early 1940s, providing distraction and perhaps catharsis in a time of war (cf. Rigby 178), were a number of motion pictures by Universal. Encouraged by the sweeping success of both the reissues of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* in 1938 and the new feature *Son of Frankenstein* in 1939, the studio produced a series of sequels of its 1930s Gothic hits, such as *The Invisible Man Returns* (1940) or *The Mummy’s Hand* (1940), which could not measure up to the originals, though. One Universal film of this period stands out, however, and is of particular importance with regard to Gothic cinema: *The Wolf Man* (1941). In fact the studio’s greatest hit of the decade and a follow-up of its minor success *The Werewolf of London* (1935), it was with this partly expressionist film that a new type of Gothic horror, the werewolf, literally came into the picture. Although somewhat inspired by werewolf mythology, folklore, and respective traditions and legends, *The Wolf Man* – directed by Curt Siodmak and starring Hollywood star Lon Chaney Jr. as the bipedal anthropomorphic creature – actually invented its own set of werewolf rules and conventions. It thus “[fashioned] a whole new monster ‘mythos’” (Rigby 216), which would forever shape the werewolf film.¹²³

In his book *The Monster Show*, David Skal has presented an interesting connection between the rise of the werewolf film, including the new monster iconography it spawned, and Adolf Hitler, who was obviously fascinated by wolves, thus establishing a nice link between the popular culture and the political landscape of the time (cf. 211ff). Keeping in mind that the first name “Adolf” is a compound of the Old High German words “adal” or “athal” (noble) and “Wolf” (wolf) (cf. Waite, qtd. in Skal 211f.), it is safe to assume that the lycanthropic creature served, among other things, to represent the (far from noble) “monster” Adolf Hitler; although the full extent of Hitlerian horrors was of course not perceptible at the time of *The Wolf Man*’s release. It then comes as no surprise that the “Wolf Man’s saga was the most consistent and sustained monster myth of the war” (218), as Skal has noted. Interestingly, the film drew heavily on Freudian motifs (for example, Talbot’s phallic, wolf-headed cane);¹²⁴ a direction that many films in the 1940s, including those by Jacques

¹²³ Due to its success, a sequel with the title *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* was not long in coming and released in 1942; this time featuring Lugosi as the monster and, once again, Lon Chaney Jr. (Universal’s new horror star) as the wolf man, who would again reprise this role in *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945).

¹²⁴ As Worland has noted, the film’s title was also inspired by Freud’s work, more precisely by one of his case studies (179).

Tourneur, would take (cf. Worland 70).¹²⁵ Most importantly, however, *The Wolf Man* inaugurated what one might want to term “manimal” horror: revolving around man-turning-animal monsters and thus providing a special take on the man/beast theme made popular by Stevenson’s Gothic novel *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*,¹²⁶ these films dealt with the dual nature of man, uniting “normality and the Monster” in one and the same person (Wood 118).¹²⁷ Transformation in these films “is represented as a regressive process in which the natural animal world takes over from the civilised, human domain as man regresses into an uncanny beast, familiar yet unfamiliar” (Creed xiii).¹²⁸

Recognizing Universal’s financial success with horror pictures and the werewolf film, in particular, RKO Pictures, which had greatly suffered during the Depression, decided to climb on the bandwagon. A fruitful endeavor, as it turned out, since some of the studio’s soon-following motion pictures not only secured RKO’s comeback, but in fact put the Gothic film back on the map, if only for a short time. In 1942, Val Lewton (born Vladimir Ivan Leventon) was hired by RKO’s new production chief, Charles Koerner, and put in charge of the newly established “B” horror unit. Lewton, in turn, brought French-American filmmaker Jacques Tourneur (sometimes working under the pseudonym Jack Turner) on board, with whom he had worked on the second unit of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1935). Together, they made three visually sophisticated – or rather visually poetic – highly atmospheric, and somewhat noir-style low-budget films that came to occupy an important place in the history of Gothic cinema – and (as highly ambiguous films) in fact formed a stark contrast to Universal’s (rather clear-cut) Gothic pictures of the period: *Cat People* (1942), *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943), and *The Leopard Man* (1943). Tourneur, son of the distinguished French director Maurice Tourneur, for whom he had worked for some time both in Europe and since 1918 also in Hollywood (becoming a U.S. citizen one year later), had started out as a script clerk and later worked as his father’s assistant, assistant director, and, after his father’s return to France, as editor for all of his French films between 1930 and 1934 (cf. Fujiwara 22). To

¹²⁵ According to Mary Ann Doane, the 1940s were the “decade of the most intense incorporation of psychoanalysis within the Hollywood system” (45). Many people were now familiar with Freudian concepts such as the unconscious, repression, or dreams as representations of repressed emotions (cf. Worland 187). Interestingly, as many critics (Punter, for example) have pointed out, the spread and reception of Freudian theory came rather belated.

¹²⁶ Incidentally, an adaptation of Stevenson’s novel, directed by Victor Fleming and starring Spencer Tracy, Ingrid Bergman, and Lana Turner, was released by MGM in 1941.

¹²⁷ In this context, it is interesting to consider Freud’s discussion of war neuroses. According to Freud, war neuroses are traumatic neuroses facilitated by a conflict of the self. More precisely, they constitute a conflict between the “old, peaceful self” (the protagonist) and the “new, belligerent self” (the protagonist’s monstrous form) of the soldier, which manifests as soon as the peaceful self is made aware how much it is at risk of being killed by the adventures of its “newly formed parasitic double” (“Vorreden,” 323).

¹²⁸ With regard to the body-mind dualism in these films, it is interesting to consider that the words animal and soul (anima) are etymologically related.

some extent, Tourneur's visual style was thus surely influenced by that of his father, who had been renowned for his use of shadows as well as his atmospheric compositions (cf. Waldman).

The first film Tourneur was to direct for Lewton at RKO was *Cat People*, which became a huge success both with audiences and financially. Inspired by Universal's profitable werewolf film, which as a take on Stevenson's novel had addressed the "'schizophrenia' between ego and id, between social identity and its antagonistic shadow" and thus "the clash between domesticating culture and wild nature" (Koebner 39; my translation), Koerner came up with this catchy, pre-tested title. He then left it up to Lewton, however, to make it into a film, as long as the title fit the final product – an agreement that would become common practice for the Lewton/Tourneur films at RKO. Based on the screenplay by DeWitt Bodeen (co-developed by Tourneur and Lewton, who allegedly had a phobia of cats), *Cat People* eventually came to tell the story of Irena Dubrovna (Simone Simon), a Serbian immigrant now living in New York City, who believes that, due to an ancient curse, she is transformed into a feline predator whenever she is emotionally or sexually aroused.¹²⁹ Afraid of herself and the beast within and succumbing more and more to the superstitious beliefs that haunt her, Irena (a variation on the *femme fatale*) begins to distance herself from her husband and everyone else around her. When she begins to feel increasingly abandoned, however, the darkness inside begins to prevail (for a detailed analysis see chapter 4.1.). *Cat People* was not only strongly influenced by Freudian psychology, but also by that of the Swiss psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung, whose concept of the shadow is of particular interest with regard to Tourneur's film. In his famous study of the archetypes (shadow, anima and animus, and persona), Jung defined the shadow as the counterpart of consciousness and the projected dark and antisocial side of one's personality or "persona," which defies moral control. Michael Daniels provides the following definition of Jung's concept:

Darkness therefore represents a level of our own being that is outside our conscious knowledge and control. In Jung's model of the psyche, the shadow is the complement to our conscious persona. It is, metaphorically, the shadow thrown when the light of our persona (our consciously expressed public personality) meets the larger reality of our total being. Most of us have been brought up to acknowledge and express only a limited, socially acceptable portion of our total personality. The other, socially unacceptable, parts remain unacknowledged, generally either deeply repressed in our own unconscious minds, or projected outwards onto certain others who thereby come to represent for us all that is dark, unpleasant or evil (72).

¹²⁹ This quotidian American setting formed another contrast to Universal's Gothic films, which were usually set in indistinct European locales (cf. Worland 177).

Evoking the doppelgänger theme – that popular and particularly uncanny member of the Gothic cast (cf. chapter 3) which “presents the conflict between the conscious day view and the unconscious night view of the soul as a fascinating and at the same time fatal soliloquy” (Bronfen, *Tiefer als der Tag gedacht*, 329; my translation)¹³⁰ – Jung’s concept of the shadow applies particularly well to the haunted character of Irena and her (assumed and repressed) feline shadow. Interestingly, turning the woman into the (apparently) monstrous beast, *Cat People* presents a gender reversal of the beauty-and-the-beast theme (cf. Koebner 43); or rather, the woman embodies both beauty and beast at the same time.¹³¹ The film obviously followed in the footsteps of (Darwinism-inspired) Gothic texts about the fear of degeneration, reversed evolution, and biological regression and is thus to some extent in line with works such as Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), H.G. Wells’s *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), or Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) (cf. Punter, chapter one).

Perhaps, *Cat People* was also inspired by another highly Gothic film which was released only two years before: Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rebecca* (1940), an adaptation of Daphne du Maurier’s novel of the same title, in which the haunting presence of Rebecca, the deceased ex-wife of Maxim de Winter, plays on the psyche of his new wife, the story’s nameless heroine (some parallels to Charlotte Brontë’s famous novel *Jane Eyre*, which features the Gothic motif of the madwoman in the attic, are quite conspicuous). Thus also foregrounding the protagonist’s struggle with the monsters of her psyche, *Rebecca* was a psychological thriller as well; in fact, Gothic films now frequently took this form. What is particularly important is that Hitchcock’s film inaugurated what Misha Kavka has termed “the female Gothic of American cinema,” which “involves the haunting of a woman by another woman (usually a rival, *Doppelgänger*, or a mother) and/or by her own projected sexual fears” (219). Female Gothic films “posit a female protagonist who is simultaneously a victim and an investigator of a haunting that is caused by anxieties about transgressive sexuality. The haunting itself may be ‘real’ or may be ‘simply’ paranoid. What is important in these films, however, is that the line between the supernatural and the psychological remains permeable, with the result that phantoms must equally be read as psychological manifestations, while paranoid fears always suggest the possibility of uncanny materialization” (219). *Cat People* clearly falls into this category as well, and Tourneur’s next movie would also promote this particular type of Gothic film.

¹³⁰ [Original quote: “führt den Widerstreit zwischen der bewussten Tagesansicht und der unbewussten Nachtseite der Seele als faszinierendes und zugleich fatales Selbstgespräch vor”]

¹³¹ The shift in gender roles was a popular issue in the cinema of the time. As a result of World War II, a new type of woman had emerged, who was independent and able to take care of herself. Consequently, she was perceived as a threat to the status quo of the traditional American family.

Only shortly after the production of *Cat People* had come to an end and before it was even released, *I Walked with a Zombie* went into production; a Gothic mystery film, which received very positive reviews and also enjoyed great success with audiences. At Lewton's instigation, the team had meticulously researched and studied voodoo culture in order to create an authentic feel, which was further enhanced by having black actors (not actors in blackface) play the locals. Although the film credits an article by Inez Wallace, published in *American Weekly* magazine, as the "original story," it bears hardly any resemblance to Wallace's text.¹³² Like Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, however, it does show vague parallels to another text: Lewton envisioned the film as "a West Indian version of *Jane Eyre*" (qtd. in Bansak 141). This is visible in the film's constellation of characters, for example: Betsy Connell was obviously inspired by Jane Eyre, Paul Holland by Edward Rochester, Jessica Holland by Bertha Mason, and Wesley Rand by Bertha's angry brother Richard.¹³³ Moreover, the Halperin brothers' 1932 film *White Zombie* may well have served as an inspiration. Based on the screenplay by Curt Siodmak and Ardel Wray, the film's highly complex narrative follows Betsy Connell (Frances Dee), a Canadian nurse, who is sent by her agency to the island of St. Sebastian in the Caribbean to work as a nurse to Jessica Holland (Christine Gordon), the zombie-like wife of plantation owner Paul Holland (Tom Conway, who had also starred in *Cat People*).¹³⁴ When Betsy falls in love with her new and quite enigmatic employer (Holland) and decides to nevertheless try to find a cure for Jessica to make him happy, however, she soon not only finds herself in the middle of a complicated family affair, but is also faced with increasingly mysterious events that also involve voodoo and zombies (for a detailed analysis see chapter 4.2.).¹³⁵

¹³² Apparently, Wallace had written not just one, but a series of non-fiction articles on voodoo and zombies, including "I Walked with a Zombie" and "I Met a Zombie."

¹³³ For a more detailed comparison between film and novel, see chapter 2 in Bishop's *American Zombie Gothic*.

¹³⁴ For an interesting discussion of the film's superior "poetic structure rather than narrative structure," see page 268 in Wood's *Personal Views*.

¹³⁵ Interestingly, unlike other typical horror monsters, the zombie, which has become an equal member of the Gothic cast, actually does not have its roots in the Gothic tradition. Instead, it "originated in non-European folk culture," in particular, African-Caribbean voodoo culture (McIntosh & Leverette viii). Until the first decades of the 20th century, despite early travel literature about the Caribbean, which sometimes mentioned voodoo rites, the zombie was "virtually unknown outside of Haiti" (Dendle 2). With the U.S. occupation of Haiti between 1915 and 1934, then, the zombie soon entered not only the American, but also the Western popular imagination in general (via news reports and accounts). However, it was probably William B. Seabrook's travel book *The Magic Island* (1929), with information on Haiti and voodoo, which "catapulted [the zombie] to instant fame" (Dendle 2), and thus played a significant role in further embedding its myth in the Western popular imagination. Although some people argue that Frankenstein's monster or Dr. Caligari's somnambulist Cesare, for example, can or even should be regarded as zombies, the zombie – actually being referred to as such – did not enter the entertainment industry until 1932, when Kenneth Webb's stage production with the title *Zombie* premiered and, shortly after, the Halperin brothers' *White Zombie* was released. It was this motion picture, today considered by most scholars as the first legitimate zombie film, which introduced the zombie to cinema as a new and from now on increasingly frequent teammate. In contrast to later zombie films, such as those by George Romero, but similar to Tourneur's film, *White Zombie* still revolves around the Haitian-folklore type of zombie as "a body

One of the film's most confusing issues concerns the identity of the zombie mentioned in the film's title. Although two actual zombies are explicitly presented (Carrefour and Jessica) and Betsy walks with both of them at some point, it seems that the zombie description applies to other characters as well. Holland, for example, could well be described as being in a death-like state, that is to say, he appears emotionally deadened. The boundary between real zombies and zombie-like human characters is thus (metaphorically) blurred. Following Gothic convention, the film, even more so than *Cat People*, actually abounds with binary oppositions: light (day)/dark (night), white/black, rationalism/superstition, science/magic, Christianity/voodoo, to name but a few. All of these boundaries are somehow transgressed in the course of the film; for example, when Betsy leaves her rational views behind and journeys into the night to seek help at the voodoo temple or when Mrs. Rand, a doctor and widow of a Christian missionary, turns out to be a mediator between the white and black communities, who also avails herself of voodoo.

Although Tourneur's third RKO picture does not share the Gothic quality of the first two films, it deserves some attention, not least because it completes the Lewton/Tourneur cycle. *The Leopard Man*, a mystery thriller and Tourneur's third RKO film with Lewton, again picked up on the man/beast theme that also lay at the heart of *Cat People*, although in a rather different way. Based on the screenplay by Ardel Wray and Edward Dein, which was in turn based on Cornell Woolrich's novel *Black Alibi* (1942), *The Leopard Man* revolves around a number of mysterious killings in a New Mexican town. After a leopard escapes from a show at a nightclub during a publicity stunt, three women are brutally murdered – these brutal killings of women in Tourneur's film actually somewhat foreshadowed the sadistic killings that would play a central role in later Gothic horror films, such as those by Roger Corman (see chapter 5). The first victim, Teresa Delgado (Margaret Landry), a teenage girl, is killed in front of her home upon her nightly return from an errand she was running for her mother; the second victim, Consuelo Contreras (Tula Parra), is killed while waiting for her lover in a cemetery one night; and the third victim, Clo-Clo (Margo), a dancer at the aforementioned nightclub, is killed while walking a deserted street alone at night. Because Jerry Manning (Dennis O'Keefe) and his girlfriend Kiki (Jean Brooks), Clo-Clo's rival, feel responsible since the publicity stunt involving the leopard had been their idea, they start an investigation. Soon, however, they realize that the leopard is not the monster they have been

which has been hollowed out, emptied of selfhood" (Warner 357); where corpses are reanimated to work as laborers, usually in a mill. These earliest zombie movies were mostly concerned with racial issues in the context of colonialism and also with the possession of women for sexual reasons (cf. McIntosh 5). Oftentimes, however, zombies here only served as "atmospheric details" (Dendle 3).

looking for. Instead, the curator of the local museum, Dr. Galbraith (James Bell), turns out to be a serial killer, who (quite literally) used the leopard for his murders. Although *The Leopard Man* privileges terror over horror and avails itself of many of the same visual techniques and strategies as *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie* to create an uncanny and sublime atmosphere, it does not quite fall into line with Tourneur's first two movies in terms of Gothic quality, since it lacks the element of the Todorovian fantastic. From the beginning, it is clear that no supernatural forces are at work; therefore, there is never a moment of hesitation in this regard. While in *Cat People* it is never entirely resolved whether Irena really had a feline identity and transformed into a big cat or not, although throughout the film it is (visually) strongly suggested that this is the case, *The Leopard Man* is not about "a man who supernaturally becomes a leopard but [about] one who merely pretends to be one" (Fujiwara 98).

What clearly connects all three films is their remarkable, idiosyncratic form of horror, or rather terror: they suggest more than show it – what Wood has called "poetic suggestiveness" (*Personal Views*, 259) – and are characterized by a lack of visible horrors. Often, the specific use and, in particular, the deliberate omission of sound or a musical score, which heightens the senses and thus makes them more sensible to the goings-on of one's environment, serve to amplify the sublimity of the moment. One particularly striking effect, which was first used in *Cat People* and again in *The Leopard Man*, was the so-called "bus," which refers to a sudden sound that seems to announce an imminent threat (for example, a panther-like growl), but then turns out to be nothing out of the ordinary (such as the air brakes of a bus, hence the term). Bansak has noted that although not visible, there is always an uncanny "presence of an inescapable dark force" (425). Lewton, and Tourneur probably as well, knew that "the power of the camera as an instrument to generate suspense in an audience lies not in its power to reveal but its power to suggest; that what takes place just off screen in the audience's imagination, the terror of *waiting* for the final revelation, not the seeing of it, is the most powerful dramatic stimulus toward tension and fright" (Harrington, qtd. in Telotte, "Dark Patches...", 40). While Lewton allegedly merely disliked horror spectacles that were too explicit or overt, especially those by Universal, Tourneur "apparently disliked virtually all horror films, including those of Roger Corman and even James Whale" (Fujiwara 31). It thus probably suited him just fine that Lewton had a more subtle form of horror in mind for their pictures. Reflecting their personal tastes, then, the terror in Lewton and Tourneur's films "became a conscious aesthetic approach" (Worland 11). Very much in the tradition of nineteenth-century and American Gothic fiction, their films show a special

penchant for terrors that are of a psychological nature, drawing their inspiration from Freudian or Jungian psychology. Most horror films in the early forties confronted viewers with “jolting encounters with previously unseen terrors,” where some kind of “monstrous presence typically [served] as a catalyst, embodying our anxieties or serving to visualize ... ‘our collective nightmares’.” By contrast, the Tourneur films consistently focused “on the internal and intangible rather than on what lies threateningly ‘out there’,” revealing “the manifestly inadequate mental picture his characters have of their world” (Telotte, “The Horror Mythos,” 119-20). Hence, they stood out strongly against the conventional horror picture of the time. It was probably for this reason that Tourneur’s films rather drew adult than teenage audiences (cf. Bansak 149).

One means to avoid visible horrors was the use of darkness. Lewton once aptly stated that “[if] you make the screen dark enough, the mind’s eye will read anything into it you want” (qtd. in Telotte, “Dark Patches,” 41). In other words, stimulating the imagination – what Ann Radcliffe considered one of the characteristics that made terror sublime (see chapter 1) – darkness rendered the explicit showing of horrors superfluous, and Tourneur readily availed himself of this fact.¹³⁶ In the dark, provided that there is still enough light left to be able to see at least something, (familiar) objects suddenly seem to take on a different, unfamiliar appearance and as a result become uncanny (which is one reason why most people are afraid of the dark). Darkness, like shadows, always causes obscurity, which Burke defined as something that is particularly conducive to the sublime (cf. chapter 2.1.). Tourneur thus used darkness to evoke terror. In this regard, it is also interesting to note that dark spaces always (seem to) hide or conceal something.¹³⁷ Since one cannot see (in other words: know or access) what is hidden or concealed, they become spaces of the “unknown” – and thus, by metaphorical extension, spaces of the “unshowable,” or “unspeakable,” to use a popular corresponding term from the realm of the Gothic. As Fujiwara has observed, Tourneur’s cinema was “obsessed with the unshowable” (12). Like Lewton, then, who was convinced that “audiences will people any patch of prepared darkness with more horror, suspense and frightfulness than the most imaginative writer could ever dream up” (Turner, qtd. in Rigby 226), he also believed in the power of darkness and dark spaces; which in his films often dominate the scene in a way that they seem to fill entire spaces and absorb everything else. In fact, as Fujiwara has noted, this is where his films draw their “dramatic and emotional power” from (9). Hence the “unusual number of night scenes” (Bansak 425) and prevalence of dimly-

¹³⁶ Obviously, the abandonment of visual horrors also accommodated budgetary limitations.

¹³⁷ Interestingly, Tourneur’s characters often move in and out of darkness or emerge from the darkness as a threat.

lit or partially-lit scenes in his pictures, which he created with the help of systematically placed and usually visible light sources in the richly detailed and highly atmospheric settings – Tourneur regarded lighting as “the essential part” of filmmaking (qtd. in Fujiwara 29).

Tourneur’s films have become particularly renowned for their interplay between light and dark and especially for their extraordinary shadowplays. In accordance with Gothic convention, light usually indicates good and rationalism while dark indicates evil and superstition – in Tourneur’s films, darkness always prevails. In fact, Tourneur’s “expressive use of light and shadow” (Fujiwara 9) and chiaroscuro effects, which were clearly inspired and influenced by German Expressionist cinema, “gained [him] the reputation of a horror stylist of the first rank” (Bansak 424), and justifiably so.¹³⁸ Always already editing with the camera, Tourneur knew exactly what he wanted and what he was doing (cf. Fujiwara 30); consequently, he was very careful and sensitive in composing his shots. Making his shadowplays an essential part of the mise-en-scène, Tourneur masterfully employed various kinds of shadowplays to create the dark, apprehensive, and ambiguous atmosphere of his films and to evoke a sense of foreboding (cf. Ruthner’s “latency of the locus” discussed in chapter 1), discomfort, and dread. Not for nothing did Martin Scorsese call him “an artist of atmospheres;” someone who did not regard atmosphere as something that has to be established, but that *makes up* the entire movie (xi). Tourneur’s shadowplays thus served to set the tone for his films, in which a great deal is in fact conveyed through tone and visual style.

For example, Tourneur employed different kinds of both diegetic and metaphorical shadowplays to produce particular, usually spine-tingling, effects; a technique that has been utilized in both literary and visual Gothic texts from the beginning. For instance, he frequently used monstrous, ominous shadows, which are often obscure, to imply the lurking presence of some form of imminent threat or danger; such as the feline shadow in *Cat People*; the oversized shadow of Carrefour in *I Walked with a Zombie*; or the shadowplay performed by Teresa’s brother in *The Leopard Man*, which literally foreshadows the cause of her death. Tourneur took advantage of the fact that whatever is not visible or escapes from our vision in other ways (but is nevertheless somehow present), tends to be particularly uncanny and is often more frightening than horrors that we can and do see; because in such situations, our imagination is immediately stimulated to fill in, to complete the picture (for a detailed discussion of uncanny shadow effects, see chapter 3). Tourneur clearly liked the (seemingly

¹³⁸ The chiaroscuro (meaning light-dark in Italian) effect is achieved through low-key lighting, which creates particularly strong contrasts and shadows. As a result, you get “extremely dark and light regions within the image” (*Film Art*, 130).

paradoxical) idea of “screening *absence*,” which, however, “takes on a substance” in his films (Telotte, “Dark Patches”, 40). He also used vivid interplays of light and dark on the screen to mirror the mental and emotional conditions of his often psychologically dislocated characters and to visualize the abysmal, phantasmagoric shadowplays of their minds (both in the literal and metaphorical sense). In *Cat People*, for instance, besides the feline shadow that serves as a representation of Irena’s repressed monstrous double,¹³⁹ he superimposed Irena’s nightmare as a manifestation of her haunted psyche on her sleeping face, showing her innermost, deepest fears. In *I Walked with a Zombie* (as well as in *Cat People*), he repeatedly used shadows, such as bar-like shadows produced by Venetian blinds, to create confined spaces and a claustrophobic atmosphere and to thereby reflect, for example, the heroine’s emotional entanglement and physical confinement as well as the deadness and restrictiveness of the Holland/Rand family; in other words, shadows here constitute a symbolic visual language of confinement. In Tourneur’s films, shadows and shadowplays thus not only serve to create uncanny spaces and atmospheres and to imply the presence of an impending threat, but also to symbolize particular states of mind.

Revealing the director’s marked preference for what Bansak has termed the “stranger-in-a-strange-land motif” (428), the protagonists in his films are usually (geographically and culturally) displaced, disconnected, or estranged outsiders and figures of the in-between, who have to cope with a new and foreign environment (cf. Bansak 423). Irena in *Cat People*, a native of Serbia, immigrated to New York; Betsy Connell in *I Walked with a Zombie* is originally from Canada, but now works on the island of Saint Sebastian in the Caribbean; and even the American protagonists in *The Leopard Man*, even though the film is set in the U.S., have to cope with the somewhat exotic New Mexican environment – that is, all three films depict a clash of cultures in one way or another, as the troubled and enigmatic characters (about whom not much is revealed in the films) get caught up in trying to explain and solve mysterious events.¹⁴⁰ As Fujiwara has observed, Tourneur liked to position the characters of his Gothic films between certain “boundaries that are simultaneously or fluctuatingly real, imaginary, and symbolic,” the “space between these poles” being “Tourneur’s special territory” (3). In a Gothic fashion, often due to something from the past that haunts them and surrounds them with a strange air of guilt and sin, they find themselves in a dark state of

¹³⁹ Incidentally, in this connection, an interesting German idiom is worth considering: “einen Schatten haben” (literally to have a shadow), which means to be out of one’s senses.

¹⁴⁰ In this connection, it is interesting to consider an observation by Wood, who has noted that in the Tourneur films, one “is led to forget about geography and interpret the films in terms of an opposition between day-consciousness and night-consciousness, between a surface world of conventional and unimaginative ‘normality’ ... and a far richer underworld of dangerous and fascinating dreams” (*Personal Views*, 258).

instability or insecurity between self and Other, situated between human and animal, between living and dead, or between health/sanity and sickness/insanity (cf. Fujiwara 3); and Tourneur visualizes them as such by means of his shadowplays (shadows per se being phenomena created by the interplay between light and dark). For example, characters are often (partly) covered by or bathed in shadows and thus subordinated to patterns of light (Fujiwara 87). This stylistic feature, which is also characteristic of film noir, creates a disquieting and hopeless, even fatalistic, mood (cf. Schrader 235); especially since it often seems as if the characters merge with their environment and are thus “not fully present” (Fujiwara 87), reflecting their insecure or unstable states – as if they were themselves only shadows (of their selves), both on the visual and the symbolic/narrative level of the film.

The opaque characters and the states of “in-between-ness” of the protagonists in combination with Tourneur’s uncanny visualization strategies create a strong atmosphere of uncertainty and ambiguity, both on the diegetic and the visual level. The films deliberately play with the viewers’ minds, employing what Bansak has termed the “‘deceptive appearances’ motif,” which is central to Lewton and Tourneur’s productions (434); characters and events are seldom what they appear to be. Especially in his two Gothic films, *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie*, we are, for instance, again and again unable to differentiate between the natural (rational) and the supernatural (irrational); as J.P. Telotte has observed, the Tourneur films circle around the two poles of the superstitious and the rational (120). As a consequence, we often experience moments of hesitation: we are confronted with (visual) impressions that defy any explanation,¹⁴¹ and we are unsure of what to believe and whether we can still trust our vision/senses. Does Irena really transform into a feline predator? Or is her feline shadow merely a figment of her (and the viewer’s) imagination, a “[monster] from the Id” (Telotte, “The Horror Mythos”, 126), generated from within? After all, her transformations are never shown. Is Jessica really undead and a zombie? According to Todorov, it is precisely this moment of hesitation that forms the basis for the fantastic (cf. chapter 1).¹⁴² As has been shown, instead of actually showing and letting the audience see with their own eyes, Tourneur – the great master of subliminal threat besides Hitchcock (cf. Grob 114)¹⁴³ – employs different techniques to confuse or disorient the viewers to play with or implant certain ideas in their minds. In *Cat People*, for example, he not only uses eerie feline shadowplays to visually imply the beast’s lurking presence, but he also cleverly (cross-)cuts

¹⁴¹ These might be interpreted as comments on the inconceivable horrors of the war.

¹⁴² According to Telotte, the fantastic in the Lewton/Tourneur films is (mostly) generated by “a subtle dialectic between substance and lack, presence and absence” (qtd. in Fujiwara 2).

¹⁴³ [Original quote: “der größte Meister dieser unterschwelligen Bedrohung”]

scenes, letting the audience combine the perceived images in a way which encourages them to believe they “know” what is happening – which, of course, is not necessarily in accordance with the facts. He thus merely suggests things, leaving a great deal (of off-screen action) to the viewers’ imagination.

From a present-day perspective, Tourneur’s cinema of shadows, first and foremost his two films *Cat People* and *I Walked with a Zombie*, occupies a special place in the history of Gothic cinema. Due to the director’s skillful employment of extraordinary and highly suggestive visual strategies, above all his shadowplays, his films not only reached a level of ambiguity and thus terror that outshone that of their contemporaries, giving them a particularly Gothic quality; but they created a powerful Gothic vision that was and still is of an exceptional and inspiring character. Tourneur mastered the art of leaving his audience “in the dark” well, both on the diegetic level and, quite literally, also on the visual level. In Robert Wise’s view, Tourneur thus “brought something new to the so-called horror films,” his films being “a rare breed – the ‘psychological’ horror film where the tension and fear [are] generated not by monsters and special effects but by suggestion, *the fear of the unknown*” (Wise 1).

4.1. Screening the Monstrous Psyche: *Cat People* (1942)

She was one of the dreaded "Cat People" - doomed to slink and prowl and court by night... fearing always that a lover's kiss might change her into a snarling, clawing KILLER!
(Tagline for *Cat People*)

Whatever is in me is held in, is kept harmless, when I am happy.
(Irena Dubrovna)

From the outset, Jacques Tourneur's first motion picture for RKO, produced by Val Lewton, creates a dark and ominous atmosphere. Before the film even begins, its title and opening credits are superimposed on the painting of a sinister-looking, muscular panther – according to Burke, a sublime animal that causes terror (*Enquiry*, 61) – which appears tense, as if it were feeling cornered or threatened. Horizontal lines that run across the painting and immediately evoke the imagery of a cage add an additional claustrophobic element. The sequence thus already hints at the film's central themes of repression and paranoia. *Cat People* continues to abound with doomed cat imagery. In the next shot, the camera reveals a miniature equestrian statue of a warrior who is triumphantly holding up a cat impaled by his sword, which is shown in a close-up against the background of the panther image. The following quote, taken from *The Anatomy of Atavism* by one Dr. Louis Judd, is superimposed on this scene, which immediately points to the film's psychological overtones: "Even as fog continues to lie in the valleys, so does ancient sin cling to the low places, the depressions in the world consciousness." While the camera continues to show this image, fog slowly enters the scene from the right, as if, following the quote's metaphor, ancient sin was eerily and hauntingly creeping into the picture (in both senses of the word); or to evoke another Gothic reading, as if fog, a common Gothic trope, which tends to veil and obscure reality, was already beginning to obfuscate the reality of the film. Within just the first minute of *Cat People*, Tourneur, aided by Nicholas Musuraca's skillful cinematography, thus masterfully sets the Gothic tone for his film and already creates a strong sense of mystery, superstition, and haunting, which is emphasized throughout by Roy Webb's expressive score. As a result, the viewers, who are probably not yet able to make sense of any of this, already find themselves in a state of suspense, eager to learn the rest of the story.

Cat People opens with a full shot of a (now real) growling panther restlessly strolling along the bars of its small cage in a zoo – that "space of *sanctioned* anomaly" (Berks 37) – in what turns out to be the city of New York.¹⁴⁴ The confinement of the cage is further

¹⁴⁴ Dynamite, the panther, again reappeared in *The Leopard Man*.

emphasized by the bar's shadows on the floor; Tourneur thus keeps up the imagery of a constricted or locked-up feline beast, which was already presented at the very beginning of *Cat People* and as a visual trope runs like a thread throughout the entire film. The apparently frustrated animal forms a stark contrast to the high-spirited environment and funfair atmosphere of the zoo. Revealingly, it is against this backdrop that Tourneur introduces the two main protagonists of his film: Irena Dubrovna (Simone Simon), an enigmatic fashion designer and native of Serbia, who just like the panther seems out of place in the American metropolis of New York City (and increasingly so as the film progresses), immediately associating her with the big cat and establishing her as the strange Other;¹⁴⁵ and Oliver Reed (Kent Smith), a carefree, all-American man, who works as a draftsman for a shipbuilding company.¹⁴⁶ Irena is obviously fascinated by the panther and busy making sketches of the animal. Oliver, by contrast, whose interest Irena arouses when she decides to throw her latest sketch into a nearby trash can, which she misses, is the sort of average zoogoer who, sipping his coke, is simply enjoying his pastime and showing only little serious interest in the feline predator – a behavior pattern that later resurfaces in the relationship with Irena. When the two meet, it is immediately clear that a romantic relationship will develop between them. However, when Oliver picks up Irena's crumpled-up drawing to throw it away for her and wordlessly points to a sign which reads "Let no one say, and say it to your shame / That all was beauty here, until you came," both the sign and Oliver's patronizing behavior already foreshadow the dysfunctional direction their relationship will take. It is also indicated from the beginning that their romance is overshadowed by a dark secret: as the two leave together, the film cuts to a torn sketch that Irena had dropped before. When the wind suddenly flips it over, a close-up reveals the unexpected and highly disturbing drawing of a panther, impaled by a huge sword, on which the shadow of the cage bars is superimposed, once again evoking the idea of a trapped monster. Calling to mind the miniature equestrian statue from the film's beginning, the sketch not only gives the viewer a first sign of Irena's troubled soul, but also eerily foreshadows the film's tragic ending.

¹⁴⁵ Lewton initially wanted to open the film with a scene set in a snowbound Balkan village occupied by a Nazi Panzer division, whose soldiers are slaughtered by the villagers, who are cooperative during the day, but turn into mauling beasts at night, thus giving the film an explicit war-related subtext. However, he later discarded the exotic Balkan setting and instead chose to set the film in the modern city of New York in order to bring the film "closer to home" (Bansak 125-26), thus falling into line with an American Gothic convention (see chapter I.2.4.1.). The urban New York setting was also supposed to give the film a more "real" feel and thereby enable the viewers to identify with the characters as they are confronted with strange and mysterious situations, because, as Tourneur put it, "if you're going to have horror, the audience must be able to identify with the characters in order to be frightened" (qtd. in Fujiwara, 72).

¹⁴⁶ Obviously, this opposition between foreign/strange and American/familiar was a topical theme in the war-time America of the 1940s.

Initially, however, everything appears to be fine, as Oliver and Irena flirtingly try to get to know each other better. Oliver is genuinely fascinated by Irena and her exotic Serbian background that is evidently so different from his. He is particularly surprised and pleased when after some seemingly hopeless attempts to invite her to a date, Irena bluntly invites him to her apartment for tea (or so she says). “Oh, Miss Dubrovna,” he exclaims happily, “you make life so simple”; a statement that seems to imply “that a sexual tryst will occur without much effort at seduction on his part” (Worland 180). When Irena unlocks the door to her apartment (which is also covered by bar-like shadows that signal her psychological condition), however, she hesitates for a moment, as if her door was a threshold that once crossed allowed no turning back; a key moment in this Gothic film in which the transgression of (sexual) boundaries that plays a central role has fatal consequences. Thus, when she tells Oliver that she has “never had anyone here,” that he is “the first friend” she has “met in America,” and that he might be her “first real friend,” this not only seems to imply that she has never been intimate with a man before, pointing to a fear of sexual penetration that will become increasingly obvious in the course of the film; but also almost sounds like a warning – a warning that might well be addressed at the both of them. Another indicator that there is something odd about Irena is the strong perfume she uses. Entering her brightly lit apartment – and thus crossing the threshold – Oliver seems irritated by the scent, which reminds him of “something warm and living”; the allusion to an animal’s overpowering smell and thus to Irena’s animal nature is rather obvious.

The next scene opens with a close-up of the small equestrian statue from the film’s beginning, which is now tellingly revealed as part of the décor in Irena’s living room and, like the image of the caged feline, keeps reappearing throughout the film. Darkness has already fallen, bathing the room in shadows, and Irena is shown leaning comfortably with eyes closed against a wall by the window in the dark, humming contentedly (calling to mind a big cat’s purr), while Oliver is sitting nearby on her sofa, smoking; the viewer can only assume what has happened in the meantime. When all of a sudden the roaring of lions from the zoo is heard, Irena explains to Oliver’s astonishment that she likes their sound, which she finds “natural and soothing.” The panther, by contrast, which she can also hear sometimes, “screams like a woman,” she says, and she therefore dislikes it; which comes as no surprise given her ambiguous relationship with the animal that probably reminds her of herself. Irena’s connection to cats is further emphasized when she notes that she did not realize how dark it was getting, as if she was equipped with a cat’s extraordinary night vision; and another hint at

her feline self is given when she expresses her liking for the dark, the time when cats are most active. Irena is thus increasingly surrounded by an aura of mystery.

As she cleans up their cups – that is, they did have tea after all – passing a three-part folding screen showing a panther on her way into the kitchenette (in fact, the painting from the film’s opening credits), Oliver’s attention is caught by the statue of what he learns to be King John of Serbia, who “drove the Mamluks out of Serbia and freed the people.” Wondering what the statue means and why King John is spearing a cat, Irena replies that it is not really a cat but that it is “meant to represent the evil ways into which my village had once fallen.” Providing a first indication of her superstitious, haunted psyche, Irena then recounts (at first eagerly, but then in an increasingly dreamy and sad manner, while several cats are looming on a painting above her head)¹⁴⁷:

You see, the Mamluks came to Serbia long ago, and they made the people slaves. Well, at first, the people were good and worshipped God in a true Christian way. But, little by little, the people changed. When King John drove out the Mamluks and came to our village, he found dreadful things. People bowed down to Satan and said their masses to him. They had become witches and were evil. Well, King John put some of them to the sword, but some, the wisest and the most wicked, escaped into the mountains. Now do you understand?

Realizing that Oliver, who does not seem to take her story very seriously and asks her what it has to do with her, does not understand, she continues that “those who escaped, the wicked ones, their legend haunts the village where I was born.” In other words, she too remains subjected to this haunting of “ancient sin”; a form, highly popular in Gothic fiction, which Abraham and Torok called transgenerational haunting (see chapter 2.4.1.). Before more is revealed, however, a clock suddenly reminds the two that it is getting late, and Oliver jokingly, but obviously also a little disappointedly, notes that “boys who come to tea can’t expect to stay to dinner” – a remark that might indicate that they did indeed only have tea and were not sexually involved. It thus comes as no surprise when he asks her for another date, this time for dinner.

For their second date, Oliver makes Irena an unfortunate present: a kitten, of all pets. The animal’s frightened reaction towards Irena is yet another example of Tourneur’s ominous cat imagery which he repeatedly employs to suggest the heroine’s beast-like nature and the threat she poses to others. In contrast to Irena, who knows that “cats just don’t like me,” Oliver is surprised since his co-worker Alice (Jane Randolph), introduced in a previous scene, had no trouble at all playing with the cat; a fact that not only presents her as Irena’s easy-going opposite, but more importantly already foreshadows the rivalry that will soon develop

¹⁴⁷ The painting shown in this scene is Goya’s *Don Manuel Manrique Osorio de Zuñiga* (1784-1792). Tourneur cleverly draws attention to only the lower left corner of the painting, in which three cats are depicted.

between the two women.¹⁴⁸ To cheer Oliver up, Irena suggests that they go to the pet store to exchange the cat for another animal; but her presence among the pets evokes a similar panic as with the kitten before. Unlike Oliver, who seems to be immune to what is apparently going on around him, the storekeeper (Elizabeth Dunn) has realized right away that there is something “not right” about Irena, which the “ever so psychic” animals, cats in particular, could immediately sense.

A first explicit indication of Irena’s disturbed psyche is given in the next scene, which is once again set in Irena’s apartment – oddly enough, Irena and Oliver always meet and stay at her apartment (her territory), never at his place, which is never shown; which might point to Irena’s independence and Oliver’s search for a home as well as his spinelessness – and underlined by cat symbolism. Resting in front of the fireplace in Irena’s otherwise dark living room, Oliver and Irena, shown against the visually highlighted background of the statue of King John and the feline folding screen, confirm their love for each other. When Oliver wonders why they have never kissed, however, which must also mean that they have never been intimate at all so far, Irena suddenly tenses up and her smile freezes. A close-up showing her biting her lips clearly reveals her emotional turmoil, which is also nicely emphasized by Webb’s score which now changes from an amorous tune into a melancholy one – Oliver has obviously touched a sore spot. Unsuspectingly ascribing her reserve to her Serbian background, which shows how little Oliver understands about Irena and how deep the gap between them really is, he begins to explain to her what would be common practice in America: “when people in America are in love, or even think they’re in love, they’ve usually kissed long ago.” It seems that Oliver just wants for them to be a “normal” American couple; a wish that cannot be fulfilled, as becomes more and more apparent. For the first time, Irena voices her terror of the past, of those “evil things,” haunting her (interestingly, the backrest of a chair behind her now gives her head the appearance of a cat’s head by adding feline-looking “ears,” thus hinting at her feline double), explaining that she had dreaded this moment and that she had never wanted to fall in love. Although she never explicitly says what exactly it is she fears, it is obvious that she has been trying to avoid any kind of sexual contact so far. Once again, Oliver does not take her seriously and patronizingly tries to convince her that her beliefs are nothing but fairy tales: “They’ve nothing to do with you, really. You’re Irena. You’re here in America”; which means, a safe place that has no room for superstitious tales. “You’re so normal, you’re even in love with me, Oliver Reed, a good, plain Americano.” When he finally proposes to her, the relieved expression on Irena’s now happy face awakens

¹⁴⁸ For a detailed and very interesting analysis of the “dialectic” between Irena and Alice, see John Berks’s essay “What Alice Does: Looking Otherwise at ‘The Cat People’” (34ff).

the hope that perhaps everything might turn out well after all – a hope that is soon dashed however.

The wedding banquet, significantly with only Oliver's friends and colleagues as guests, which underlines Irena's status as an outsider, and organized by Alice, is held on a snowy day at The Belgrade restaurant, obviously to accommodate Irena. In fact, Alice is trying hard to be friends with Oliver's wife, if probably primarily to please him. It is also Alice who reassures those who seem concerned about Irena's "odd" character and the marriage in general that "Irena is a grand girl" – an impression she will soon reconsider. When Oliver's boss, the Commodore (Jack Holt), raises a toast to the bride, this arouses the interest of a woman (Elizabeth Russell) sitting nearby, who looks like a cat, as Oliver's co-worker Doc Carver (Alan Napier) notes. Her delicate facial features and her put-up hairstyle, decorated with a black ribbon that is strongly reminiscent of cat's ears, indeed give her an elegant feline appearance – forming a stark contrast to Irena with her kitten-like face, whom Lewton wanted to look "cute and soft and cuddly and seemingly not at all dangerous" (qtd. in Bansak, 126) – which is further emphasized by the sleek black gown she wears and a black fur scarf she later puts on. At the sight of the woman, who has suddenly walked over to the table to greet Irena with the words "moya sestra," meaning "my sister," the smile vanishes from Irena's face and she crosses herself as if to protect herself. To Irena, this is obviously not just a friendly encounter between fellow countrymen, but she clearly interprets the woman's greeting as a sign of one cat woman recognizing another and thus as a confirmation of her own presumed identity. Although the party continues and Oliver once again mocks his wife's superstitious belief in the cat people, calling her a "crazy kid" (and thus treating her like a child), the terror remains written in Irena's face.

Overshadowed by the incident at the restaurant, the couple's wedding night sheds more light on what really troubles Irena, what Koebner has called a "perverted exaggeration of sexual fear" (*Unheimlich anders*, 43; my translation). As Fujiwara has noted, the "main tension in the film comes from Irena's fear of her own sexuality as 'evil' – a daring choice of theme for 1942" (73). When on their return from the banquet the taxi drops the couple off in front of Irena's apartment building, Irena suddenly turns sad and hesitates to go inside; the snow continuously falling on her nicely reflecting her increasingly showing frigidity. Unable "to be Mrs. Reed really" and "everything that name means" to her, in other words, unable to consummate their marriage as long as she is haunted by "that feeling there's something evil" in her, as Irena explains, she desperately begs her husband for patience, which he generously grants. That a sexual encounter must indeed be utterly out of the question is made

unmistakably clear a short while later when Irena, now dressed in nightwear and lingering at her bedroom door, shyly attempts to open her door to be with Oliver, who is lingering just as impatiently in the adjacent room, and perhaps have her wedding night after all. Before she can turn the door knob, she is suddenly interrupted by the panther's almost reproachful-sounding yowl, which she resignedly interprets as a warning.

Tourneur continues to emphasize Irena's connection with the panther and to build up the suspicion of a beast trapped inside her. In the next short scene, she finally visits the big cat again after a month-long absence following her marriage. Irena, now tellingly dressed in a long black fur coat, which hints both at her growing identification with the panther (and by extension the cat people) and at the fact that she is increasingly abandoning herself to her suspicious beliefs, expresses her fascination with the "beautiful" feline predator, which she obviously regards as her soulmate even though she is at the same time repelled by it. Perhaps, she feels particularly drawn to the caged animal now that she is married; a state that might cause her to feel entrapped.¹⁴⁹ The zookeeper (Alec Craig), however, cannot share her admiration. On the contrary, in his view, the panther is "an evil critter" and "the worst beast of them all" (a close-up showing the snarling animal visually corroborates his claim). Quoting the Book of Revelation from the bible, he says: "And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard," that is, "like a leopard, but not a leopard." Although he is referring to the panther (biologically simply the black form of a leopard, due to melanism), the viewer immediately understands his remark as a reference to Irena, for whom the same seems to be true: she also is not a big cat, but probably like one.

In the next scene, Tourneur also suggests Irena's predatory nature. Opening the scene with a nicely composed shot showing a close-up of the shadow of a bird cage falling onto the feline folding screen in a way that the panther seems to attack the bird, Irena is soon shown in a similar position, thus once again associating her with the big cat. In other words, the folding screen, which usually screens, that is, protects Irena from the scrutiny of others, here, like the film screen, "screens," that is, projects and thus exposes Irena's animal nature. As in *The Leopard Man*, Tourneur thus uses an elaborate shadowplay to foreshadow an event that will take place only moments later. Like a cat playfully putting her hand (her long fingernails

¹⁴⁹ Many critics, such as John Berks (cf. 37ff), have pointed out the fact that in the early 1940s, which were overshadowed by World War II, many (middle-class) women left hearth and home to work in hitherto male-dominated jobs instead; conventional gender roles were thus to some extent dissolved, giving rise to the "monstrous species" of the working woman (as also embodied by film noir's *femme fatale*). Like Alice, Oliver's only female (though somewhat masculinized) colleague in the shipbuilding company, Irena has also worked (as a fashion designer) to support herself until she got married to Oliver. Now, as echoed in the zookeeper's song, she will most likely soon have "nothin' else to do" but being Mrs. Reed and "is thus fundamentally at odds with her newly domesticated status" (cf. Berks 36).

giving it a paw-like appearance) into the bird cage Oliver gave her as a present earlier in the film and chasing the animal around, a close-up shows Irena's at first amused and, as the sound from the cage suddenly ceases, frustrated face. What happens inside the cage is not shown, but can only be guessed – a strategy Tourneur repeatedly put to great effect in the course of the film. Eventually, the camera reveals the dead bird. Deeply saddened, Irena puts it into a small, coffin-like box, returns to the zoo, and, with a shudder, feeds it to the panther; in Worland's view, "a gesture like a sacrifice to a pagan god that seems to mark complete surrender to her supernatural destiny" (183), perhaps also a gesture that is meant to appease whatever dark forces Irena feels herself subjected to – in any case, a moment that marks a turning point in the story.

Later that evening, Irena, dressed in black as if in mourning, gives vent to her inner turmoil. Not only does she envy other women for their happiness, their ability to make their husbands happy and lead a normal life, and their freedom, indicating that she herself is not happy – a fact the zookeeper had unwittingly noted earlier when he remarked that people do not visit the big cat as long as they are happy – that she does not see herself as a proper wife with a normal life, and does not feel free; but it also frustrates her that the bird died of fright when she tried to take it in her hand, which she seems to interpret as a sign of her malign nature. By extension, Irena appears to be convinced that whatever – or whomever – she touches (or makes love to), she will ultimately hurt or even kill. She also confesses to Oliver that she "had to" throw the dead bird to the panther, thus describing it as a compulsive act, as if something had uncannily made her do so, which is what frightens her. As Irena gets up and walks towards the statue of King John, lost in thought, it is once again made clear that she genuinely believes in the curse of the cat people. Oliver also realizes this now, and for the first time he takes Irena seriously, not her superstitious belief, but the mental derangement it symptomizes. He therefore decides that they must get help; not the kind of help Irena would expect from her hero King John, but "intelligent" help in the form of "someone who can find the reason for [her] belief and cure it," in other words, a psychiatrist. Desperate, Irena immediately agrees.

While so far, the psychological overtones in Tourneur's film have been rather subtle, *Cat People's* penchant for psychoanalysis now takes an explicit form. In Irena's first session with Dr. Judd (Tom Conway), whose book was quoted in the opening credits, the (by now perhaps somewhat clichéd) methods of psychoanalytic treatment are applied to the young woman. Lying on the doctor's couch in his darkened office, Judd uses hypnosis to expose Irena's psychotic disorder. To underline the focus on her mind, only Irena's face is

illuminated by a circular spotlight (one of the systematically placed, visible light sources Tourneur liked to employ) as she discloses her feline haunting. Following a Gothic convention in terms of character constellation, Dr. Judd, even more so than Oliver, is presented as the scientific, rational, and somewhat dry counterpart to Irena's superstitious and emotional character; accordingly he is associated with light (the symbol for consciousness) while she is associated with the dark (the symbol for the unconscious). That he will neither be able to understand nor help her is visually emphasized by vertical and horizontal shadow lines that give his office the appearance of a cage, once again invoking the image of the (psychologically) trapped feline. In her book *The Desire to Desire*, Mary Ann Doane has made an intriguing remark: "*Cat People* is, on the one hand, the dramatization of a quasi-psychoanalytic scenario – the surfacing of the invisible, chaotic forces of instinct or the unconscious. On the other hand, the film demonstrates the limits of psychoanalysis and rationality in general when faced with femininity." (49). Recapitulating what Irena has just told him, Dr. Judd notes and thus informs the viewer that, because of the curse of the cat people that has allegedly befallen the women in her village, Irena is convinced and fears that whenever she experiences strong emotions or passions, such as jealousy or anger, or whenever she falls in love and becomes intimate with someone, she will change into a feline monster – the Hyde-like embodiment of her repressed sexual desires – and, "driven by her own evil," kill this person.¹⁵⁰ In Dr. Judd's view, which obviously draws on the psychological studies of Sigmund Freud, the case is simple: Irena's trouble must be the result of a childhood trauma, more precisely, the mysterious death of her father and the subsequent teasing by other children who would call her mother a witch or cat woman, and he confidently promises to "repair the damage."

Irena's new-found confidence and the resulting good mood are soon dampened again, however, when she finds Oliver and Alice in her apartment and, what is more, realizes with horror that her husband has been letting his "buddy" in on Irena's mental condition for quite some time already. For the first time, Irena feels not only jealous – and with good reason, as Oliver and Alice appear to be increasingly drawn to each other and also begin to form a team against Irena – but also very angry. Churned up inside, it comes as no surprise when later that night, upon the panther's plaintive cry that mirrors her own mood, Irena (again dressed in her

¹⁵⁰ Here, it is interesting to consider an observation by Mladen Dolar, who noted that the "double is a 'disturber of love:' [it] typically springs up at the moment when one is about to touch, or to kiss, the [person] of one's dreams; [it] springs up when the subject comes close to the realization of his [or her] wishes, when he [or she] is on the brink of attaining full enjoyment, the completion of the sexual relation" (14). Moreover, the "release of sexuality in the horror film is always presented as perverted, monstrous, and excessive ... , both the perversion and the excess being the logical outcome of repression" (Wood 130).

black fur coat) visits the big cat at the zoo and, in an equally restless manner as the feline, paces back and forth in front of its cage (separated from it only by a chain, which signals the yet incomplete process of doubling). Probably realizing herself that her obsession and identification with the animal as well as the beast inside her are growing increasingly stronger, she once again warns Oliver, as in the beginning of the film at her apartment door when he was about to literally cross the threshold into her life, to never let her feel jealousy or anger. "Whatever is in me is held in, is kept harmless, when I am happy," she says. In other words, as long as Oliver remains loyal to her, without becoming intimate, the repressed beast within her is kept at bay.

It is not long before things start to change for the worse however. Realizing that Oliver, who claims that he has never been unhappy in his life, is now unhappy in his marriage – which calls to mind the sign from the zoo that read: "Let no one say, and say it to your shame / That all was beauty here, until you came" – Alice, who says that she cannot bear to see him unhappy, decides to no longer keep her feelings for Oliver a secret and confesses her love for him. Oliver, in turn, admits that he is unsure whether it is really love he feels for Irena, whom he still barely knows, or perhaps just a fascination with her; like the film audience, he has to watch her when she is in the room. To him, she is still the strange Other. When he notes that he does not really know what love is, Alice gives him her idea of love: she pictures a carefree, everlasting life with Oliver. Meanwhile, Irena has stopped going to her appointments with Dr. Judd. This not only worries Oliver, but also Dr. Judd, who therefore goes to confront Irena at the zoo one day. Witnessing how she gives the zookeeper the key to the snarling panther's cage, which he had left in the lock, the psychiatrist praises her for resisting the temptation, the "psychic need to loose evil upon the world," which he ascribes to what Freud defined as the death drive (a close-up of the key earlier emphasized the apparent moment of temptation). Dr. Judd notes that although she fears the panther, she is nevertheless drawn to it, and, uncannily foreshadowing the film's tragic ending, he wonders whether she might not turn to it "as an instrument of death." Obviously touching Irena in a sore spot, she appears both ashamed and angry. She is convinced that despite his great knowledge he cannot help her: "when you speak of the soul, you mean the mind," but, she adds, "it is not my mind that is troubled."

Growing more and more discontent with Irena because he feels that she is not frank with him and also does not accept help, Oliver begins to increasingly confide in and take refuge with Alice – the dangerous "new type of other woman," as she describes herself later in the film (implying both her status as an independent working woman and her possible role

as Oliver's mistress) – arousing Irena's jealousy. As a consequence, she begins to stalk Alice. When after a quarrel, Oliver returns to his office, Irena suspects that he is meeting Alice there (which she regards as confirmed when she calls and Alice answers the phone). Feeling betrayed, she decides to spy on them. Underscored by gloomy music that creates a strong sense of foreboding, she finally spots them together in a restaurant, not knowing that their meeting was in fact a coincidental one. When upon leaving the restaurant Alice turns up her collar and in reply to Oliver's question whether she is cold says "a cat just walked over my grave," the viewer immediately associates this death-invoking statement with Irena, who, once again dressed in her black fur coat, is uncannily looming in the shadows (although she is almost exclusively shown in form of her doubling mirror image in a shop window). "A big girl now" and not afraid, Alice rejects Oliver's offer to walk her home – a decision she is about to regret.

What follows is one of the two famous stalking scenes Tourneur incorporated in the film, availing himself of a striking play with shadows and an ingenious montage (skillfully edited by Mark Robson). The camera tracks and crosscuts between Alice, who is walking along a high stone wall down a deserted, nightly walkway and Irena, who is close on Alice's heels; in fact, it is the clicking of heels that forms the only sound in this otherwise silent scene. Due to the distance between the individual street lamps, which already provide only dim light and thus evoke a gloomy atmosphere, light and dark areas are created along the street so that Alice and Irena walk in and out of darkness. While Alice continues to move in a steady manner, underscored by the rhythmic clicking of her heels, Irena accelerates her pace (the editing tempo increasing at the same time), closing in on Alice while the clicking of her heels sounds increasingly obtrusive. Cutting to Alice again, the camera suddenly stops as she leaves the frame, but where according to the sound of her heels Irena should have appeared now, nothing comes into sight and the clicking also ceases. This sudden change in the soundscape seems to irritate Alice, who becomes increasingly uneasy and obviously only now has the feeling of being followed. When she anxiously looks over her shoulder, however, a close-up reveals that there is no one else on the street. Panicking (emphasized again by an increased editing tempo and by the camera continuously moving in on Alice as she runs, which limits the viewer's view of her environment and thus creates suspense), Alice seeks shelter in the light of a street lamp. A sudden growl from off screen creates a blood-curdling moment of true shock – but it is only the hissing sound of a bus coming to a halt next to Alice (this sequence in fact gave rise to the term "bus" to refer to such an effect).

Probably counter to the expectations of most viewers, no monster has appeared in this scene, perhaps producing a much more terrifying effect than a monstrous appearance would have created; a strategy Tourneur's film repeatedly employs in the second half of the film. Yet, the uncanny presence of a beast is implied as the film continues. As Alice safely gets on the bus, her eyes are caught by a rustling bush. Soon after, the camera cuts to the caged panther in the zoo; only to then cut to a nervously bleating herd of sheep, several of which have obviously been mauled by a big cat, as the footprints which the farmer discovers on the muddy ground suggest. Even more revealing is a tracking shot showing wet paw prints on concrete, which then mysteriously transform into the prints of a woman's high heels. While the camera continues to track along the prints, the clicking sound of heels becomes increasingly audible, and when the next shot shows an obviously exhausted Irena (the sound of heels matching the sound of her footsteps), the audience is downright forced to conclude that the mauling beast must have been her. The fact that Irena appears shaken and tired – she later confesses to Dr. Judd that she suffers from lapses of memory – might indicate that “she fought the impulse, whether psychotic or supernatural, to murder her rival and instead vented her rage on the sheep,” as Worland has suggested (185). Remarkably, giving particular relevance to off-screen space, nothing is really shown, especially as regards Irena's transformation into a feline monster, but a great deal is suggested, which is precisely what makes *Cat People* an excellent example of a Gothic film of terror.

Irena's condition grows increasingly worse and she is devastated. Tourneur nicely visualizes her psychological torment, that is, her fear of being a cat woman, in the phantasmagoric shadowplay of a (highly Freudian)¹⁵¹ nightmare.¹⁵² This bad dream also makes clear that she not only fears, but also despises her assumed feline self as something abject, as Kristeva defined it.¹⁵³ Underlined by eerie music that conveys a sense of foreboding, the camera zooms in sideways on a fitfully sleeping Irena until it reaches an extreme close-up of her face, as if wanting to move inside Irena's head; the cinematography clearly suggests that the viewer is now offered a glimpse into Irena's nightmarish psyche and her unconscious. This image is then superimposed by animated, vertigo-like spirals, from the center of which (that is, from Irena's head) a group of animated black cats emerge, which are obviously meant

¹⁵¹ For a Freudian reading of Irena's nightmare, linking beast and Doppelgänger, two figures that frequently feature in Gothic fiction, see pages 189-90 in Worland's book.

¹⁵² Often self-reflexive, Tourneur's film here nicely points to the film medium's phantasmagoric character and illusionary potential, which can itself become a site of uncanny projections. For a detailed discussion of this issue, see chapter I.3.

¹⁵³ According to Kristeva, abjection is caused by “what disturbs identity” (232); the abject is “opposed to *I*” (230). For a detailed account of the abject, see her essay “Approaching Abjection.”

to symbolize the (presumed) feline powers inside her.¹⁵⁴ Uncannily drawing nearer in a vertigo-like vortex, the cats spread across the screen and thus seemingly surround Irena as well as the audience. Following the cats, Dr. Judd, dressed as King John, appears and draws his sword, holding it horizontally, which then transforms into a key; a direct link between the psychiatrist, the scientific form of help, and King John, Irena's superstitious version of a savior, is thus established, while at the same time also foreshadowing the King John-like fatal impalement of the cat/Irena by Dr. Judd at the end of the film. Blending Irena's nightmarish vision with that of the viewers and thus involving them, the audience is able to share her point of view and experience the same sense of threat, but can at the same time keep a safe distance (due to the screen) – which is, of course, precisely what allows this sublime experience to be pleasurable (cf. Burke; see chapter 2.1). As a result, our identification with her in this scene is not fully complete, which aids the sense of ambiguity and doubt that Tourneur obviously intended to evoke. The entire sequence is accompanied by a voice over of Dr. Judd, which uncannily repeats in an increasingly threatening way the things he told Irena at the zoo, namely that “there is, in some cases, a psychic need to loose evil upon the world” and “a desire for death.” The constant repetition of the word “key” – the key to the panther's cage Irena decided not to take earlier, but will take in the next scene, and, by extension, the key to what is locked or repressed inside her – finally wakes Irena from her nightmare.

Tourneur's second stalking scene is Irena's angry and jealous reaction to an unpleasant visit at a maritime museum with Oliver and Alice, whose close relationship is now more than obvious (they not only refer to themselves as “we” now, making Irena an outsider, but are also positioned as a unity in the *mise-en-scène*; moreover, Alice calls Oliver “Ollie,” which signals their intimacy). Excluded from their togetherness, Irena decides (while visually juxtaposed to an Egyptian jackal-headed Anubis figure) to follow Alice home to the YMCA.¹⁵⁵ Alice's play with a little black kitten at the reception desk while getting the key to the swimming pool nicely foreshadows and forms the peaceful counterpart to the dangerous “play” she is about to become involved in; a situation that is also heralded by the frightened hissing of the kitten in the bathing cabin moments later, which the viewer automatically interprets as a reaction to Irena's presence (calling to mind a similar scene from the film's beginning), who is already on her way to the pool. Unperturbed, Alice turns off the light –

¹⁵⁴ It is actually an interesting cinematographic detail that the cats in Irena's nightmare are animated cartoon characters. That is to say, the idea inevitably suggests itself that Tourneur perhaps chose this visualization strategy to indicate that the whole idea of being the victim of an old Serbian curse is only a (childish) figment of Irena's imagination after all (cartoons are particularly “unreal” and often geared towards children) and to thereby increase the level of ambiguity for the viewer.

¹⁵⁵ In Egyptian mythology, of course, the god Anubis is associated with death.

like the repeated omission of a musical score in this scene, an effective visual strategy to increase the level of tension – but is suddenly disturbed by a growl and a shadow (Irena’s feline double?) coming down the stairs to the pool area; once again, Tourneur invokes the imagery of the caged beast as the bar-like shadow of the banister falls on that of the monstrous shadow. In panic, Alice jumps into the deep end of the dimly-lit pool and stays at its center, perhaps building on the common knowledge that cats are afraid of water. The growling continues, but Alice cannot make out anything; the heavy shadowplay of the water’s reflection on the wall (a result of the fact that there is only one low-key light source above the pool’s center) as well as a shadow briefly passing in front of the camera not only obscure her vision but the viewers’ as well. When all of a sudden, a slightly more distinct, somewhat feline shadow appears moving alongside the pool (in fact produced by Tourneur’s hand), once again suggesting an uncanny presence, and the panther “screams like a woman,” Alice joins in, her cry eerily echoing off the walls.¹⁵⁶ Like a cat playing with its prey, Irena, who now comes into view and turns on the lights, appears visibly amused by Alice’s fear and smiles condescendingly. Alice’s hesitation to leave the pool in Irena’s presence shows that she is now genuinely afraid of her, and from Irena’s threatening and jealous behavior towards Alice, asking her where Oliver is, it is obvious that Alice’s fear is justified (interestingly, while Irena has transformed from a weak woman into a strong one, Alice, who used to be strong, now appears weak). Her shredded bathrobe clearly suggests that a feline monster – most likely Irena, although once again her transformation is not shown and the kitten might also be held responsible – is after her.

From this point onwards, the noose rapidly tightens on Irena as Oliver and Alice, who now believes in Irena’s “cat form” (according to Dr. Judd a sign of her bad conscience resulting from her affair with Oliver), and Dr. Judd team up against her. In fact, all of them are concerned with their own interests. Alice and Oliver want to get rid of Irena in order to be able to officially be together. Dr. Judd, on the other hand, appears to be fascinated by and infatuated with Irena, which shows when he proposes to kiss her, and thinks that she is only playing games with him. They progressively drive her into a corner: Dr. Judd by threatening her with the prospect of sending her to an insane asylum and Oliver by talking of divorce – a dangerous thing to do to a wild animal, which Irena increasingly appears to be, as is also nicely suggested when she shreds the backrest of her sofa with her claw-like fingernails – and

¹⁵⁶ In an interview with Joel Siegel, Tourneur stated that “despite orders to re-shoot the scene, I shot it so that you couldn’t really be sure what you were seeing. That’s the only way to do it. In the swimming pool sequence, the cat was my fist. We had a diffused spotlight and I used my fist to make shadows against the wall” (qtd. in Telotte, “Dark Patches,” 56).

Irena begins to realize not only the failure of her marriage, but also the overall hopelessness of her situation. As she grows increasingly mad with anger and jealousy, it comes as no surprise when all three soon experience Irena's beast-like nature (or so it is suggested) firsthand.

Working late in their dimly-lit office, which is consequently bathed in shadows by means of which Tourneur creates a strong sense of foreboding, Alice and Oliver first realize that something is odd when the phone rings, but no one answers on the other end of the line – an uncanny situation Alice had already experienced the night she was first stalked. Suspecting Irena behind the call and thus frightened, the two decide to leave. But as Oliver begins to turn off the lights – increasing the already ominous darkness – Alice suddenly realizes that the door, which was still open a minute ago, has now not only mysteriously shut, but they are locked in; in other words, there is no escape. A growl catches their attention, and for a brief moment, the camera shows a real panther eerily approaching them from the dark, its eyes aglow (like those of so many Gothic monsters). Although the panther is shown several times in the drafting room scene – a concession the RKO front office had forced the filmmakers to make (cf. Fujiwara 78) – Tourneur masterfully avails himself of darkness, which envelops the animal, so that the few glimpses of the big cat are obscured and limited. He also employs nice shadowplays; in particular, a feline shadow and a shadow showing Oliver and Irena holding up a drawing tool to protect themselves against (or exorcise) what they believe to be Irena, which, looking like a Christian cross, immediately calls to mind a superstitious means of protection against demonic powers. By means of these dark spaces and patches, Tourneur creates a strong sense of ambiguity and thereby amplifies the terror of this truly sublime scene.

The bell for the film's grand finale is sounded by Dr. Judd, who, despite warnings from Alice and Oliver, makes a fatal mistake when he waits for Irena in her apartment later that night and harasses her. As he tries to kiss her, out of affection, but also to prove to her that her stories were nothing but superstitious belief, a slowly darkening close-up of Irena suddenly shows her eyes turning aglow, calling to mind feline eyes in the dark. In a beautifully edited montage (again the skilled work of Robson), which clearly suggests that it is Irena who attacks Dr. Judd, Tourneur shows the psychiatrist's mortal combat with the feline beast in an impressive shadowplay, partly projected onto the panther image on the folding screen. Only the final moments of the struggle actually show the big cat as it lunges at Dr. Judd one last time. When Alice and Oliver, who have just arrived, hear the psychiatrist's death cry, the camera reveals Irena hiding in the staircase, implying a guilty conscience and thus her involvement in the feline attack. Once again, her transformation is never shown, but

only strongly suggested by the cinematography. Realizing that half of Dr. Judd's cane/sword (in Freudian terms, a phallic instrument used in the doctor's attempt to "penetrate" Irena), which not only served as a walking stick, but also as a means of protection, has been broken off, Oliver and Alice assume that he must have wounded his killer, whom they believe to be Irena, and they set out to find her.¹⁵⁷ The camera then turns to an obviously stricken Irena arriving at the panther's cage in the now fog-shrouded zoo; an effective Gothic device that adds an additionally veiling element to the already obscure and ambiguous events. Cross-cutting between the panther and Irena, thus once more underlining their apparent doppelgänger connection, Irena is shown as she unlocks the door to the cage to – both literally and metaphorically – set the trapped/repressed beast free once and for all. What Dr. Judd had augured all along thus comes true: Irena succumbs to the "psychic need to loose evil upon the world" and thus gives in to her death drive. The panther's provoked attack, for which Irena seemed well-prepared, eventually ends fatally for both of them; according to Gothic law, an inevitable ending, as Irena is being punished for the transgression of strict boundaries. "She never lied to us," Oliver notes in the end, but the last shot, showing Irena wrapped in her black fur coat one last time – or is it a panther? – leaves at least a shadow of a doubt. Never actually showing a transformation, the film provides no clear-cut resolution as to whether Irena really ever turned into a cat woman or not. Even though a real panther appeared in several scenes, there is no proof that it was indeed Irena's feline form, though this seems to be the most obvious possibility (it also has to be kept in mind that she was in possession of the key to the panther's cage and could have let it out, although this would obviously raise the question of how the animal was caged again). To the very end, Tourneur's *Cat People* thus plays with what Todorov called the fantastic (see chapter 1). The quote by John Donne, taken from his Holy Sonnets, V., which is superimposed on the film's final shot – a quote that links Irena's fate with those of increasingly beast-dominated characters such as Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's novel or Larry Talbot/the werewolf in *The Wolf Man* – reinforces this: "But black sin hath betrayed to endless night / My world, both parts, and both parts must die."

¹⁵⁷ In an earlier scene, when Alice advised Dr. Judd to be careful around Irena, he mocked her, suggesting a gun with a silver bullet as a means of protection before revealing to her that his cane in fact also functioned as a sword; a clear reference to the werewolf legend (and probably to the film *The Wolf Man* that was popular at the time), linking Irena to the werewolf creature (cf. chapter II.4.).

4.2. Voodoo Gothic: *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943)

See this strange, strange story of a woman whose lure set brother against brother; whose love caused hate – and whose beauty bowed to the will of an evil spell in whose power we must refuse to believe – EVEN IF IT'S TRUE!

(Tagline for *I Walked with a Zombie*)

The characters and events depicted in this photoplay are fictional. Any similarity to actual persons, living, dead or possessed, is purely coincidental.

(Disclaimer for *I Walked with a Zombie*)

The shadows and half-lights of the film's haunting atmospheric quality are in fact but the expression of its moral and spiritual world, in which nothing is fixed or certain, nothing is as it seems: a world subtly dominated by the subconscious, a world of shadows in which we can do no more than cautiously and hesitantly grope.

(Robin Wood, *Personal Views*)

Tourneur's second production with Val Lewton for RKO, which was first released in the United States on 30 April 1943, begins with an extreme long shot showing the silhouetted figures of what later turn out to be the zombie Carrefour (Darby Jones) and the film's heroine Betsy Connell (Frances Dee) walking along a beach.¹⁵⁸ In a voice-over, calling to mind the beginning of Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940), a slightly amused female remembers:

I walked with a zombie. It does seem an odd thing to say. Had anyone said that to me a year ago, I'm not at all sure I would have known what a zombie was. I might have had some notion – that they were strange and frightening, even a little funny. It all began in such an ordinary way.

Setting the film's frame, this opening sequence – which actually delivers what the title promises: a walk with a zombie – thus makes clear that what is about to follow is the subjective flash-back of a possibly unreliable narrator, a common feature particularly of American Gothic fiction. The film's first scene then reveals to whom the "I" in the title refers and whose story the film tells when Betsy Connell, a Canadian nurse, is offered a new job as a caregiver for the wife of Paul Holland (Tom Conway, who also starred as Dr. Judd in *Cat People*), the British owner of a sugar plantation on the island of Saint Sebastian in the West Indies. Although the facts that the job is very well-paid and that the human resources manager asks Betsy whether she believes in witchcraft already suggest that there is something odd about her new workplace, she is too enthusiastic about the prospect of leaving wintry Ottawa to work under palm trees in the Caribbean instead to give these aspects any thought. In other words, as becomes a Gothic heroine, she ignores all warning signs.

¹⁵⁸ In fact, this shot is diegetically ambiguous as it "has no logical place within the narrative," as Wood has pointed out (318).

Only a few days later, Betsy meets up with her new employer in Antigua, where they board a ship to Saint Sebastian. The scene on the ship, underscored by the melancholy chant of Holland's native employees and the gloomy atmosphere of nightfall, provides a good first impression of what she is about to become involved in and thus creates a sense of foreboding. Enjoying the beauty of her surroundings and looking forward to her new life, Betsy's happy and enthusiastic mood is soon darkened when Holland – as if he had read her mind – tells her: “It's not beautiful!” He continues to explain why: “Everything seems beautiful because you don't understand. Those flying fish, they're not leaping for joy. They're jumping in terror. Bigger fish want to eat them. That luminous water, it takes its gleam from millions of tiny dead bodies. The glitter of putrescence. There's no beauty here, only death and decay.” As they watch a falling star, he adds meaningfully: “Everything good dies here, even the stars.” Betsy's optimism and perhaps a little naïve character (comparable to that of the governess in Henry James's Gothic novel *The Turn of the Screw*) are thus contrasted to the pessimism and enigmatic character of Holland. Although Betsy is irritated by the “cruelty and hardness in his voice,” she nevertheless feels drawn to him, which heralds the start of a romantic, but overshadowed relationship: “And yet something about him I liked,” she notes in another voice-over, “something clean and honest, but hurt, badly hurt.”

Upon her arrival on the island of Saint Sebastian, a heterotopic setting typical of the Gothic, Betsy learns from the carriage driver (Clinton Rosemond) who takes her to the Holland estate that the “colored folks” were brought to the island as chained slaves long ago by the old Holland family.¹⁵⁹ The fictional island and the Holland family are thus imbued with a dark history. Moreover, although Betsy came with Paul Holland on her own free will, the driver's account already hints at the oppressive atmosphere she will soon experience in Holland's environment. “They brought you to a beautiful place,” Betsy says, still optimistic, but the driver's complaisant “if you say, miss” clearly suggests otherwise: as with Holland on the ship, Betsy is deceived by (beautiful) appearances; a theme that plays a central role throughout the film and, according to Wood, provides the “clue to reading the film” (*Personal Views*, 268). Again in a voice-over, Betsy recounts her memories of her arrival at Fort Holland, which seemed “strangely dream-like” to her. As the camera shows a series of establishing shots of different, but deserted areas of the estate, she then remembers what she experienced in these individual, richly decorated rooms (the skilled work of art directors Albert S. D'Agostino and Walter E. Keller), foreshadowing parts of the film and thus creating

¹⁵⁹ Saint Sebastian, like the ship before, is a heterotopia in the Foucauldian sense (cf. “Of Other Spaces”), the heterotopic character of which is further emphasized by the fact that it is a fictional place. For a detailed discussion of Foucault's definition of the term “heterotopia,” see chapter II.5.0.

suspense as to what will happen. She also remembers her wonderment about the “stillness of Fort Holland” and that there was no one in the garden or in the rooms; besides the island setting, this is a first indication of the residents’ isolation and aloofness.

From the beginning, the film creates a strong sense of ambiguity and uncertainty; things are seldom what they appear to be, and expectations are often reversed. This is also true for the next scene. Later that evening, Betsy is shown refreshing herself. Not only the room, but also Betsy is covered by horizontal, bar-like shadows created by Venetian blinds. These shadows, a visual trope that Tourneur, aided by J. Roy Hunt’s extraordinary cinematography, employs throughout the film’s *mise-en-scène*, not only create a claustrophobic atmosphere, underscored by ominous music (once again composed by Roy Webb), but also signal Betsy’s beginning state of entrapment. Another shadow, which suddenly emerges and crosses her as she is combing her hair, pointing to a person uncannily lurking off-screen, adds to the already sinister feel of the moment (cf. chapter 3). As so often in Tourneur’s films, however, the tension is relieved when the shadow turns out to be only Clement (Richard Abrams), a servant, calling her to dinner – once again, an appearance has been deceiving. Shortly after, Betsy meets Wesley Rand (James Ellison), Paul Holland’s seemingly charming, American half-brother, who is the only one to keep her company at dinner. The scene is revealing, but at the same time also creates an even greater sense of mystery. Not only is the family background explained – Paul Holland is Mrs. Rand’s first child, and after his father’s death, she married Wesley Rand’s father, a missionary – but Wesley’s disparaging and obviously envious comments about his “strong, silent, and very sad” brother, the plantation owner and thus the “only important man around here,” point to the dysfunctional relationship between the two brothers. Moreover, there seems to be something odd about his relationship to Holland’s wife. When, suddenly, the sound of jungle drums disturbs their conversation, Wesley, realizing the startled look on Betsy’s face, at first mockingly calls them “mysterious” and “eerie,” but then informs her that they are simply “Saint Sebastian’s version of a factory whistle,” which signals that the sugar syrup at the sugar mill is “about ready to be poured.” The same being true for Wesley’s drink – his penchant for alcohol is obvious from the beginning – Holland’s arrival at the scene not only thwarts his plans to have another glass of whiskey, but also clearly makes Wesley, who seems to be somewhat submissive to his brother, uncomfortable so that he leaves; another sign of their uneasy relationship.

Betsy’s first night at Fort Holland is depicted as a highly uncanny experience, which is further emphasized by music that creates a sense of foreboding. Again bathed in heavy

shadows that evoke the image of a cage while standing at her window looking out of the dark room into the night, Betsy's eye is suddenly caught by a ghostly woman in white crossing the garden – a trope used in a number of Gothic texts, such as Wilkie Collin's novel of the same name, and in this case perhaps inspired by Geraldine Dvorak's appearance in Browning's adaptation of *Dracula* (see chapter 2.4.2.). It is Holland's wife Jessica (Christine Gordon), whose tall, blond, almost ethereal figure forms a strong visual contrast to the shorter, dark-haired Betsy; in fact, the film clearly plays with the conventional light-equals-good/dark-equals-bad opposition here by inverting it – a “poetic ambiguity” that runs like a thread through the film (Wood, *Personal Views*, 269). Interestingly, throughout the film, the Fort's jungle-like, all-overrunning (and often both literally and metaphorically all-overshadowing) garden with the figurehead is linked with the mysterious voodoo world of the natives outside Fort Holland. Visually and symbolically, its wilderness forms a strong contrast to the almost sterile tidiness of the different areas and rooms in the house (which incidentally all open to the garden) that symbolize the “civilized” world of the Holland/Rand family. That Jessica first appears in the garden is certainly no coincidence, as her character presents a link between both worlds. Later that night, Betsy is awakened by the sound of a woman's weeping, which leads her to the tower in which Jessica is accommodated. As Kyle William Bishop has pointed out, Betsy's “chief character trait is curiosity,” a “plot parallel to ... [Brontë's] *Jane Eyre* and [Du Maurier's] *Rebecca* that moves the story forward” (84).

Tourneur's claustrophobic visualization of the mysterious tower, which forms a strong contrast to the other, rather open, low-rise buildings of the estate, is particularly sinister. As Betsy enters, the camera cuts to an establishing shot of the staircase (which is somewhat reminiscent of the expressionist staircase in *Whale's* *Frankenstein*; see chapter 2.4.2.). Only the stairs are lit (by light falling through a small, in fact the only, window above) while the rest of the tower's inside is shrouded in darkness. As Betsy ascends the stairs in the dark, her oversized and distorted shadow is cast on the wall, looming eerily above her. In general, she is dwarfed by her surroundings, which creates an almost overpowering feel. While she is calling for Mrs. Holland, the camera cuts to an open door at the bottom of the stairs, which obviously leads to Jessica's room (also bathed in horizontal, bar-like shadows, which reflect her constricted state of mind) and from which she now emerges, ascending the dark stairs as if in a trance. Meanwhile, Betsy has stopped in a well-lit spot, from where she sees Jessica approaching her. Obviously happy to finally make her patient's acquaintance, Betsy addresses Jessica, while the camera crosscuts between the women as they walk towards each other. As Jessica steps into the light, however, Betsy realizes that something is very wrong, and a close-

up shows her horrified face before Jessica continues to drive her back against the wall. With a piercing scream, Betsy escapes at the sight of what the camera reveals to the audience only seconds later in a nice shot where Jessica eerily approaches the camera: her pallid, skeletal face with dark circles around her hollow eyes looks like that of a dead person; in other words, familiar, yet strange, she is a quintessentially uncanny appearance. Jessica continues her pursuit, but before any harm can be done, Holland arrives with Clement and Alma (Teresa Harris), a maid, and thus “saves” Betsy. Interestingly, as Kim Newman and Steve Jones have noted, Jessica’s makeup is toned down as soon as the other characters arrive, which might be indicative of Betsy’s exaggerated account as an unreliable narrator (cf. DVD audio commentary). This scene clearly establishes Jessica as “the mad woman in the attic,” another popular Gothic trope known from works such as *Jane Eyre*, which according to Lewton served as the inspiration for this West Indies version of the novel (cf. chapter 4). Like Bertha Mason, Edward Rochester’s wife in *Jane Eyre*, Jessica has been banned to the tower by her husband – a fact that may well be read psychologically as the ugly past that is repressed in Holland’s unconscious, but keeps resurfacing in the form of Jessica’s ghostly wanderings.

This is not the only example of the film’s use of the popular Gothic theme of the past haunting the present, however. Crossing through the garden on their way back to Betsy’s room, Holland addresses the issue of why the woman (in fact Alma, whose sister was giving birth) was weeping. Stopping in front of the arrow-pierced, dark-skinned figurehead of Saint Sebastian – or Ti-Misery (meaning little misery), as the natives call him – with its weeping face (the water running down the figure producing a weeping effect), which keeps reappearing throughout the film, Holland explains that it was once the figurehead of a slave ship.¹⁶⁰ “That’s where our people came from: from the misery and pain of slavery,” he continues, revealing not only his identification with the natives, but also his sense of guilt about his own family’s past. Like the isolated, haunted mansion in other Gothic texts or Jessica’s tower, the island of Saint Sebastian thus also represents the haunting past, in this case the sins of the fathers, who were slave owners. Because they “found life a burden,” Holland explains, the natives still cry when a child is born and celebrate at burials.¹⁶¹ “I’ve told you,” he emphasizes once again, “this is a sad place.”

Betsy’s first day of work, however, conveys the opposite impression. Alma’s cheerful way as she serves Betsy breakfast in bed – interestingly, Betsy is treated more like the lady of

¹⁶⁰ Saint Sebastian – here depicted as black – was a Christian martyr and saint. According to legend, he died during the Roman emperor Diocletian’s persecution of Christians after he had avowed himself a Christian. Most depictions show him tied to a post and pierced by arrows.

¹⁶¹ According to Newman and Jones, Lewton made up a great deal of the voodoo legend (cf. audio commentary).

the house than like an employee, putting her on a level with Jessica – and their short conversation about Jessica, who used to be beautiful before she became sick and ultimately went “mindless,” as Alma remembers, reestablish Betsy’s optimistic attitude.¹⁶² Incidentally, throughout the film, everything Betsy and the audience learn about Jessica is second-hand information, that is, it is gathered from the accounts of other characters and to some extent from her surroundings, such as the harp in her room.¹⁶³ As on the ship, however, Betsy’s good mood is once again contrasted by Holland’s negativism when he confronts her with his anger about her frightened behavior the night before. Objecting, Betsy explains that she was not frightened, although she used to be afraid of the dark as a child, but that the tower is nevertheless an eerie and dark place and that she was shocked to realize that her patient was “a mental case.” Holland is obviously glad that Betsy sees Jessica’s condition this way and thus shares his opinion, and he implores her to stick to this rational position, especially when confronted with the, often contagious, superstitious views and local legends of some “foolish people on the island.”

In broad daylight, Betsy’s first official encounter with Jessica in the company of Dr. Maxwell (James Bell, who also played Dr. Galbraith in *The Leopard Man*), her physician, seems far less uncanny than in the dark. “She makes a beautiful zombie, doesn’t she,” Maxwell notes, while the camera shows a close-up of Jessica’s averted, now rather peaceful and fragile-looking, catatonic face. Betsy inquires what a “zombie” is, and the physician defines it as “a ghost, a living dead,” adding jokingly that “it’s also a drink” – most viewers at the time were familiar with both the drink and the term “zombie” (see chapter 4). Maxwell then explains Jessica’s “hopeless” condition as the result of a severe tropical fever, which destroyed portions of her spinal cord and turned Jessica into “a woman without any willpower, unable to speak or even act by herself, though she will obey simple commands.” In other words (and perhaps a reference to Dr. Caligari’s somnambulist Cesare; see chapter 2.3.), she is “a sleepwalker who can never be awakened, feeling nothing, knowing nothing.” Interestingly, while Betsy and Maxwell discuss Jessica’s future treatment, the camera shows a version of Arnold Böcklin’s “The Isle of the Dead” hanging on a wall.¹⁶⁴ The painting, depicting a person dressed in white aboard a boat arriving at a desolate islet, nicely links

¹⁶² Since Betsy and Jessica are repeatedly put on a level, even visually, Wood has described them as doubles (*Personal Views*, 327).

¹⁶³ Throughout the film, Jessica’s harp, an instrument that is sometimes considered as a symbol for a connection between heaven and earth, signals her undead state and haunting presence. In one scene, for example, it is placed between Holland and Betsy, reflecting Jessica’s disturbance of their love.

¹⁶⁴ Böcklin’s painting exists in five versions painted between 1880 and 1886.

Jessica, the near-dead woman in white who lives among other zombies on Saint Sebastian, and Betsy, who just arrived on this “isle of the dead” by boat.

On her day off, Betsy goes into town, where she runs into Wesley again, and the two go to a café together. As in the earlier scene at the dinner table, Wesley’s latent alcoholism once again becomes apparent, as he orders one drink after the other, which Betsy notices. Suddenly, the song of a calypso singer (Sir Lancelot) about the Holland family’s past interrupts their conversation. Even though Wesley tries to divert Betsy’s attention from the song, she listens to it and learns that Jessica had an affair with Wesley, which then caused “the badness and the trouble.” Angry and drunk, Wesley confirms what everyone else on the island allegedly already knows thanks to his brother. Wesley even accuses his brother of having planned “the whole thing” in order to damage him. Realizing that Betsy thinks quite highly of Holland, he tells her that his brother is only playing “the noble husband,” and he warns her that what happened to Jessica will also happen to Betsy sooner or later; that is, Holland will badger her with words, his “great weapon.” A close-up of Betsy’s uneasy face suggests that she obviously has a notion of what Wesley is talking about since she already got a good foretaste of this behavior on the ship to Saint Sebastian. When Wesley falls asleep on the table a while later, the calypso singer returns and, continuing his now almost conjuring song, reveals that Wesley and Jessica wanted to elope, but Holland thwarted their plans. As a result, Jessica became sick, which ultimately caused her zombie-like state. Suddenly, echoing the scene with Jessica in the tower, he begins to uncannily and somewhat maliciously approach Betsy, who is desperately trying to wake Wesley, and even insults her by suggesting that she will soon turn the brothers’ heads. When he concludes his song with the chorus “shame and sorrow for the family,” Mrs. Rand (Edith Barrett) appears to Betsy’s great relief and saves her from further trouble. It is immediately obvious that the two women like each other, and Mrs. Rand avails herself of the opportunity to ask Betsy the favor of exercising her influence over Holland to help Wesley with his alcoholism.

Remarkably enough, Betsy does indeed have influence over Holland, as another scene at the dinner table shows. Although he denied her request to leave the whiskey decanter off the dinner table quite sharply in the previous scene, the decanter is no longer on the table when Holland, Wesley, and Betsy gather around it later on. While on the one hand, this seems to be a clear indication of Holland’s attraction to Betsy, on the other hand, it leads to another quarrel between the brothers. Wesley verbally attacks his brother, not only because he thinks that Holland is trying to impress Betsy, but also because he feels very much patronized by his apparently dominant and oppressive brother. Wesley obviously blames Holland for Jessica’s

and his own misery, but before more is revealed about “that night,” Holland puts a stop to his brother’s insinuations, keeping the viewer in suspense. Interestingly, the establishing shot at the beginning of the dinner scene, which shows the three characters framed by Venetian blinds that are found everywhere in the house, nicely reflects their constricted states, as do the horizontal shadows in the background that are once again employed: pained by the past, Wesley is obviously powerless against his dominating brother; Holland, the “Byronic hero,” as Wesley calls him, who is equally haunted by the past, seems to hide behind a cool façade; and Betsy finds herself uncomfortably positioned between Wesley, Holland, and Jessica. At the dinner table, listening to the mysterious sound of a seashell bugle and facing the all-overgrowing garden (which reflects the increasing predominance of the voodoo world), Betsy also learns more about Saint Sebastian’s voodoo culture, which, interestingly enough, leaves the brothers completely unimpressed. Because of the drought, the locals are having a ritual ceremony at the *houmfort*, a temple, in which they ask *Damballah*, the major god, for rain. “They sing and dance,” Holland explains, “and then ... one of the gods comes down and speaks through one of the people.” As Wood has noted, white rituals are juxtaposed to black rituals in this scene (*Personal Views*, 324).¹⁶⁵ Moreover, throughout the film, the cool rationalism of the white community is contrasted with the passionate beliefs and superstitious views of the black community. Interestingly, however, they seem to be mutually accepted. As Bishop has observed, “although the white characters initially scoff at the power of voodoo, they never seem to dismiss the local culture. In fact, much of the mystery and intrigue of *I Walked with a Zombie* comes not from the fear of a racial and cultural other, but rather from the white characters’ inability to understand what is really going on around them.” Thus, in contrast to earlier zombie films, in which the living dead were used to indicate the primitivism of the natives, Tourneur’s film “turns the focus back on the white world itself” (86).

The next scene provides a first, if brief, glimpse of the real Paul Holland behind the façade (another deceptive appearance) and sheds more light on the difficult relationship between him and Betsy. While he is playing Chopin’s Etude in E Op.10 No.3 on the piano, Betsy is listening in her room. Once again, Tourneur uses Venetian blinds and their horizontal shadows to underline the characters’ emotional states. Betsy, sitting in a dark corner surrounded by blinds and their shadows, her room open to the garden, which reflects her openness to the world of Fort Holland, is obviously drawn to Holland. Holland, on the other

¹⁶⁵ In his book *Personal Views*, Wood presents an intriguing reading of *I Walked with a Zombie* that is based on Barthes’s “five codes”: the *Proairetic* code (the narrative’s actions), the *Hermeneutic* code (mysteries in the narrative), the *Semantic* code (the narrative’s meanings), the *Symbolic* code (symbolism in the narrative), and the *Cultural* code (or “code of reference”) (see 306ff).

hand, shown through a closed double door with shutters that signals the seemingly insurmountable barrier between them as well as his reclusiveness, for the first time conveys the impression of a sensitive and gentle, but hurt man, emphasized by the melancholy tune he plays and the gloomy light that surrounds him – Betsy’s earlier assumption about him on the ship is thus reinforced. Eventually, Betsy decides to talk to Holland and she joins him in the music room, posing timidly, yet somewhat seductively at the door. Holland seems quite surprised, but then walks over to Betsy and stands very close to her – a first, almost romantic, approach between the two. While Betsy expresses her deep sympathy for him, Holland, in turn, apologizes for having brought her to the island; he had expected a nurse that would be “hard and impersonal,” suggesting that in his view Betsy is quite the opposite. Averting her face, Betsy passionately states: “I love Fort Holland”; a remark that clearly reveals that it is not really the place she loves, but Holland, even if he did cause Jessica’s condition, as he admits. Betsy’s affection is further emphasized by a close-up of her yearning face and the way she softly touches his arm. Suddenly, the sound of voodoo drums not only disturbs their intimate conversation, but also has a curious effect on Holland, who once again assumes an air of aloofness and dismisses Betsy.

The following short scene marks the film’s turning point; this is also where Betsy’s voice-over ends. While except for a few suspenseful moments the first half of the film was rather subdued in terms of eerie events, the second half is much more uncanny and mysterious. Underscored by a romantic tune, Tourneur shows Betsy standing dreamily on top of a moon-lit cliff above the sea; according to Wood, the sea as an “image of uncertainty,” which frames the entire film, here indicates the dubiousness of Betsy’s (subconscious) motivation (*Personal Views*, 325). In another voice-over, Betsy confesses her love for Holland and decides to restore his wife to him in order “to make him happy,” even though her own amorous feelings will remain unanswered – at this point, she has no idea that this is not at all what Holland wants, who only cares about Jessica out of marital duty. Betsy and Dr. Maxwell convince Holland to try insulin shock treatment on Jessica, a dangerous, but promising measure that might free her from her zombie-like state and can thus only make things better, Betsy argues. When the treatment does not work, Betsy is devastated because she feels she has failed Holland. He, however, seems less concerned about Jessica and instead thanks Betsy for her sympathy; this time, it is he who touches her softly. Holland’s behavior infuriates Wesley, who has witnessed their conversation and now emerges uncannily from the shadows to once again confront his brother. He is angry that Holland is obviously already in love with another woman and thus less worried about Jessica, the woman Wesley loves, but

cannot have. By visually linking Wesley to darkness, shadowing his face as well, Tourneur nicely emphasizes his status as Holland's sinister opponent.

Since Betsy's medication did not help Jessica, Betsy listens attentively, if skeptically, when Alma suggests an alternative treatment by "better doctors" in the *houmfort*, who once cured another "mindless" woman; once again, the film contrasts the rational white community (medical science) with the superstitious black community (voodoo magic). Betsy has grown fond of Alma and her people because of their happiness, which forms a stark contrast to the melancholy of the Holland/Rand family. Nevertheless, she decides to consult Mrs. Rand in this matter, who strongly advises Betsy against taking Jessica to the *houmfort*, however, because it might be dangerous for both of them. As a doctor and the former wife of a Christian missionary, Mrs. Rand expresses her skepticism towards "primitive" voodoo practices, even though she has accepted them as "part of everyday life." Since she does confirm Alma's story, however, it comes as no surprise that Betsy ignores her warning and decides to take Jessica to the *houmfort* after all. At night, while everyone else is in their rooms (which the camera shows in a nice tracking shot along the building and through the garden), Betsy and Jessica set out for the voodoo temple after having received directions and special voodoo patches from Alma – Betsy's passage into darkness nicely symbolizes her turning away from daytime rationalism and thus presents a clear (female) transgression of boundaries. As Alma pins Jessica's black patch onto her gown, the shot slowly dissolves into a shot showing the ominous silhouette of the zombie Carrefour, who, as his name suggests, guards the crossroads on the way to the *houmfort*, before the camera then cuts to Betsy leading Jessica through the billowing sugar fields. Tourneur uses an interesting technique in this particularly dark scene, which he often employed in his films and probably learned from his father: by placing sugar canes in the front of the frame, he gives the background greater depth. At the same time, he thereby conceals the limited space of the sound stage; an effect that is also achieved by the skillful montage of shots and tracking shots that create the impression that the women are walking for a long time. Moreover, by filming Betsy and Jessica through the sugar canes against a turbulent night sky, the audience's view is obstructed, which creates a sense of mystery and uneasiness. This way of building up tension is further emphasized by the uncanny sound of wind in an otherwise silent scene, which blowing through an animal's skull or a bugle repeatedly produces a tooting sound, and by various other shocking objects (a cadaver or a human skull) that the two women come across along the way. Eventually, Betsy and Jessica reach the crossroads, guarded by Carrefour. Tourneur once again masterfully creates suspense, first by a close-up that shows that Betsy has lost her voodoo patch – which,

curiously enough, has no consequences though; second, by showing a naked foot that suddenly appears in the beam of Betsy's flashlight – frisson arising solely “from the simple process of discovery” (Wood, *Personal Views*, 266); and third, by having Betsy's flashlight reveal the tall figure of Carrefour, followed by a close-up of her terrified face, and another close-up of the zombie's mindless, pop-eyed face.

The scene at the *houmfort* is quite revealing. Following the increasingly ecstatic voodoo ceremony, which consists of drumming, chanting, dancing, and a Sabreur (Jieno Moxzer) with a sword who puts people into a trance, a female voice becomes audible that offers people advice through a hole in the door of a wooden shack. When it is Betsy's turn, the door suddenly opens and she is summoned inside, where, to her great surprise, Mrs. Rand has been waiting for her to once again tell her that there is no cure for Jessica.¹⁶⁶ Betsy also learns that after the death of her husband, the natives no longer obeyed Mrs. Rand, and she soon found out that they would listen to her medical advice if she pretended that the gods spoke through her – in the figure of Mrs. Rand, “some of the structural oppositions” (science/magic, Christianity/voodoo) are thus “abruptly drawn together” (Wood, *Personal Views*, 327). Meanwhile, Jessica has caught the attention of the worshippers, who in a ritual performance injure her with the sword – but apparently Jessica does not bleed. The film thus creates a truly fantastic effect in the Todorovian sense as to whether she is really a zombie or not. It soon shows that Betsy's well-meant endeavor has serious consequences. Not only does her attempt to help Holland not find his approval, since he no longer loves his wife and also does not want her back, as Betsy learns, but her nightly trip with Jessica to the *houmfort* and the excitement it caused among the natives, reflected in their intensified drumming that continues to be heard, has also prompted the local commissioner to start an investigation. At the same time, now that the natives assume that Jessica is a zombie, they demand that Jessica be brought back to them for more ritual tests. Tourneur emphasizes the ongoing tumult by skillfully crosscutting between the scenes taking place at Fort Holland and the scenes set at the *houmfort*, thus contrasting the natives' ritualistic preparations to cope with Jessica to the white community's attempts to find rational ways to deal with the situation:

At Fort Holland, the commissioner and Dr. Maxwell suggest sending Jessica away to an asylum for her own safety. Although Holland and Betsy think that this might be best, Wesley, who believes that his brother deliberately drove Jessica insane, strongly objects the

¹⁶⁶ Newman and Jones have pointed out that, according to the film script, the voodoo ceremony “was based on a real one described in a 1937 edition of *Life Magazine*.” Moreover, they have noted that it is actually “amazing” for a film of the 1940s that throughout the movie, the native characters are presented very positively, with no sense of looking down on them (cf. audio commentary).

idea. Out of concern for Betsy, Holland, who finally confesses that he loves her, implores her to go back to Canada because he is afraid that he will harm her the way he harmed Jessica. He explains that, from the beginning, he tried to hurt Betsy the same way he (compulsively) had to hurt Jessica. Touching her softly, he concludes that ever since Betsy showed him a new way of “calm and good” love, he would “rather not have that sort of love than have it and destroy it.” Meanwhile, the voodoo community is preparing a voodoo doll that looks like Jessica (in a previous scene, Alma had also described Jessica as a doll). In a ritualistic performance, the Sabreur then trains Carrefour, whose eerie appearance is underlined by the underlighting and turbulent shadow of a fire, to bring Jessica to the *houmfort*. The two worlds are brought together again in a particularly uncanny scene. While Betsy is sleeping on a brightly moonlit sofa underneath Böcklin’s “The Isle of the Dead” in Jessica’s room to protect her (horizontal shadows and shadows created by a lattice window once again evoking the image of a cage, amplifying the claustrophobic feel of the situation), the wind blowing through the curtains, the larger-than-life-sized shadow of Carrefour suddenly falls on Betsy and the wall behind her, eerily overshadowing the scene. As so often, Tourneur avails himself of the omission of a score during this skillful montage to heighten the viewer’s senses and to thereby make them more sensitive to the environment. Awakened by this disturbance and the distinct shuffling sound of feet, Betsy gets up and puts on Jessica’s white dressing gown to find out what is going on. Crossing through the shadow-laden garden, which is now filled with an uncanny air (the silence disturbed only by the dripping sound of water) so that even a frog and an owl become objects of horror, she suddenly sees the door of the tower opening mysteriously. Hiding in the bushes (an attempt which is thwarted by her bright gown), she then sees Carrefour – that is, the camera only shows his shadow on the path as he shuffles towards Betsy and then cuts to a close-up of her horrified face – and she rushes to Holland’s room for help. Crosscutting between Paul and Betsy and Carrefour, Tourneur shows the zombie continuously approaching them despite Holland’s admonitions. Bathed in camouflaging shadows, Carrefour is visually merged with the jungle-like garden. His hands now stretched out in a (nowadays typically) zombie-like manner, it is obvious that he is mistaking Betsy for Jessica because of her white robe. As he draws unbearably near, visualized by a shot that moves in from a close-up to a blurred extreme close-up of his pop-eyed face, Mrs. Rand’s voice suddenly stops him and orders him to go back – and Carrefour obeys. Interestingly, throughout these scenes, Tourneur’s crosscutting technique creates the impression that the voodoo practices are working, thus producing another effect of the

fantastic; that is, a moment of hesitation as to whether the viewer is actually confronted with the supernatural or whether this is all just an illusion (created by the camera).

In the next scene, the film finally sheds more light on the enigma of the Holland/Rand household and on Jessica's condition, but at the same time also creates more ambiguity. While Betsy and Paul tell Mrs. Rand about Betsy's planned return to Canada, Wesley and Dr. Maxwell arrive and inform them that because of the events of the previous night the commissioner will start a legal investigation. As Paul and Wesley begin to argue as to what Paul should do, Mrs. Rand suddenly intervenes and confesses her responsibility for Jessica's condition. When Jessica wanted to elope with Wesley and was about to tear the family apart, Mrs. Rand entered into the voodoo ceremonies and asked the *houngan* (a voodoo priest) to turn Jessica into a zombie, she explains. Afterwards, she regretted her actions and tried to convince herself of the ineffectiveness of voodoo. When she returned home and saw that Jessica was suffering from a severe fever, however, she put one and one together. Although Dr. Maxwell contradicts her, noting that in order to turn someone into a zombie, that person would have to die or be in a deathlike state first, which to his knowledge Jessica never was, the scene evokes the uneasy feeling that Mrs. Rand is no "imaginative woman," as the doctor believes, but that her story might be true.

This idea is amplified when the camera cuts to the close-up of a voodoo doll, accompanied by the sound of intensive drumming. In another ritualistic performance, the Sabreur commands Jessica, represented by her voodoo-doll double, which is pulled closer by means of a string, to come to the *houmfort*. Once again, by crosscutting between the Sabreur dancing at the voodoo temple and Jessica walking towards the gate at Fort Holland, Tourneur suggests that the ritual is working. When in order to stop Jessica, who does not obey any (other) commands, Betsy and Paul close the gate, Wesley arrives and points out to them the great powers of voodoo magic. It is revealed that, in contrast to Betsy and Paul, Wesley actually believes that Jessica is a zombie because, unknown to Dr. Maxwell, she was in fact in a coma (a death-like state) at some point, which would corroborate the doctor's theory. Wesley's position in the relationship with Betsy and Paul as well as his opposing attitude towards the voodoo practices are nicely conveyed by his position within the set: he is standing on the other side (of the gate) both literally and metaphorically. Interestingly, Wesley seems to represent the viewer's standpoint. When he lists the evidence that suggests that Jessica is a zombie – "evidence" that the film has continuously led the viewer to believe in – Holland mockingly notes: "You're thinking just as they want you to think." Although "they" is clearly a reference to the voodoo people, it can also be read as a reference to the filmmakers.

Following a close-up of the arrow-pierced figure of Ti-Misery which briefly foreshadows the film's ending the camera cuts to Wesley and Betsy on the veranda. Because in Wesley's view Jessica "is already dead" and "ought to be free," he asks Betsy to euthanize her – which Betsy vehemently refuses. When some time later, Wesley sees Jessica wanting to exit the closed gate again (Tourneur once more uses crosscuts to indicate the effectiveness of the voodoo performance), he opens it for her – the fact that the previous shot showed the Sabreur whispering into his assistant's ear suggests that Wesley is now also acting under a spell. As foreshadowed, he then takes an arrow from the figurehead and follows Jessica into the windy night. The camera now cuts to the Sabreur again, and as he stabs the voodoo doll with a needle, the drumming stops and the camera cuts to Wesley, who has apparently just done the same with Jessica at the beach. Gloomy music sets in, which grows louder as the silhouetted figure of Carrefour approaches and slowly drives Wesley with Jessica in his arms into the sea surf. Following a dissolve into a close-up shot of Jessica's corpse in the water, the camera shows several gloomily chanting natives with torches wading through the water on the hunt for fish. As they find and pick up Jessica's body and carry it back to the Holland estate, where Mrs. Rand, Holland, and Betsy are shown in mourning, an unfamiliar male voice-over says what seems to be a requiem, which in a way summarizes the past events at Fort Holland, before the camera moves in to a close-up of Ti-Misery and the film ends:

Oh, Lord God, most holy, deliver them from the bitter pains of eternal death. The woman was a wicked woman, and she was dead in her own life. Yea Lord, dead in the selfishness of her spirit, and the man followed her. Her steps led him down to evil. Her feet took hold on death. Forgive him, oh Lord, who knowest the secret of all hearts. Yea Lord, pity them who are dead, and give peace and happiness to the living.

5. The 1960s and Roger Corman's Reinvention of Poean Gothic

Until the later 1950s, the Gothic horror film made in Hollywood saw a rather lean period with a meager output. New regulations concerning the hitherto oligopoly position of Hollywood's major film studios in terms of production, distribution, and exhibition (also known as the Hollywood Antitrust Case or Paramount Case); social and demographic changes in the years following the Second World War; as well as the emergence of television, which began broadcasting in 1948 and provided more and more households with the new comforts of visual home entertainment, resulting in a decline in theatrical attendance, all had their share in this low-point.¹⁶⁷ Matters were complicated further by the fact that, instead of Gothic horror, the 1950s saw the boom of a new type of horror film, which caught the spirit of the time particularly well and thus outdid Gothic cinema (even though it was often inspired by it): reflecting Cold War anxieties and unease about new technologies, first and foremost the (Soviet Union's) atomic bomb, science-fiction horror featuring alien invasions (that is, threats from the outside) or nuclear radiation disasters (producing mutations and irradiated monsters) had conquered the market.¹⁶⁸ Now, films such as *The Thing (From Another World)* (1951), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *Them!* (1954), *Tarantula* (1955), *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), or *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957), to name but a few, enjoyed great success.

It was not until the final years of the decade that Gothic cinema at last saw a resurgence – ironically, not least due to the successful broadcasting of Universal's 30s and 40s hits on television, which resulted in “[the] gothic world [entering] into popular consciousness as never before” (Worland, *Horror Film*, 85).¹⁶⁹ The British Hammer Film Productions played a decisive role in this development. They breathed new life into on-screen Gothic with their powerful, Universal-inspired takes on the Gothic classics *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*, among them such notable films as *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957) or *Horror of Dracula* (1958), which were followed by numerous sequels. Hammer also reimagined Universal's *The Mummy* (1959) and produced a werewolf film with the title *Curse of the Werewolf* (1961). Due to the visual excessiveness of these films, resulting from lavish

¹⁶⁷ For a detailed account of the new challenges Hollywood was facing since the late 1940s, see chapter one in Paul Monaco's *The Sixties: 1960-1969*.

¹⁶⁸ These new monsters, that is, aliens and mutations or irradiated creatures, represented threats to the US from the outside, such as infiltration, brainwashing, or ideological control (for example, the “Red Scare,” that is, the fear of communism, was troubling the nation's mind at the time), as well as the horrifying results of atomic testing (cf. Skal, *Monster Show*, 247-48).

¹⁶⁹ “Shock Theater,” or “Shock!,” was a package of 52 Universal horror classics released for television in the fall of 1957 by Screen Gems, Columbia's television division. The movies were typically aired on late-night television and introduced by a local host dressed up in a horror costume.

Technicolor images, which took the presentation of gore and violence to a next level and thus “[brought] the Grand Guignol aesthetic to the screen” (Worland, *Horror Film*, 82), and because of their often overt sexuality, Hammer productions became a huge international success. The studio’s major stars, Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee, soon gained iconic status and director Terence Fisher enjoyed an equally outstanding reputation.

Climbing on the bandwagon, American International Pictures (AIP) together with their house director Roger Corman, who has been declared “the most prolific director/producer in the cinema of these decades” (Punter 104), decided to also make Gothic horror movies and soon became the American counterpart to Hammer Films. Although AIP had already produced Gothic-inspired exploitation movies for young viewers and drive-in audiences,¹⁷⁰ such as *I Was A Teenage Werewolf* or *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein* (both 1957), it was actually with the AIP-Corman collaboration’s so-called Poe cycle (frequently referred to as “AIPoe”)¹⁷¹ that Hollywood Gothic saw a revival; which, as Worland has noted, “constituted a mannerist phase that upheld genre traditions while pointing to new formal and thematic possibilities” (“AIP’s Pit,” 284). The first film Corman was to direct was *House of Usher*, an adaptation of the short story “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allan Poe, America’s very own and number one Gothic writer, which was released in 1960 – the same year that also saw the release of Alfred Hitchcock’s subversive Gothic picture *Psycho*, a film that not only forever shaped the (Gothic) horror film, especially in terms of graphic violence (and narrative conventions); but, due to its design for the “primary purpose of sensation” also introduced “the aesthetic of a cinema of sensation,” which “was to become the dominant motion-picture aesthetic of the late twentieth century” (Monaco 189-90).¹⁷²

Because of *House of Usher*’s great commercial success, Corman went on to direct an entire series of adaptations of short stories by Poe, producing a total of eight movies in only four years, including *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961), *Premature Burial* (1962), *Tales of Terror* (1962), *The Raven* (1963), *The Haunted Palace* (1963), *The Masque of the Red Death* (1964), and *The Tomb of Ligeia* (1964). It is thus quite appropriate that Corman – who until then had been known, among other things, for his Westerns (for example, *Five Guns West* or *Apache*

¹⁷⁰ Drive-ins, mostly attended by teenagers and young adults, were particularly popular and prominent in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Generally speaking, the 1960s, in particular, saw a demographic shift in theatrical attendance to a mostly young audience consisting of movie goers under the age of thirty (cf. Monaco 197).

¹⁷¹ “AIPoe” is a convenient term commonly used, mostly in non-academic texts or on the internet, to refer to the AIP-Corman Poe cycle.

¹⁷² Now famously known as “the shower scene,” the brutal and bloody stabbing of the female protagonist by an average-looking man-turned-psychopath in a run-of-the-mill motel shower to the sound of Bernard Hermann’s acoustically violent violin theme forever inscribed itself in the popular imagination. *Psycho* in fact paved the way for the “New American Cinema” or “New Hollywood,” which emerged in the mid to late 1960s and, exploiting the waning of censorship, put special emphasis on sensation (cf. Monaco 196). It also paved the way for the “slasher film,” inaugurated by George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* in 1968.

Woman (both 1955)), his science-fiction films (*Day the World Ended* (1955) or *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), among others), and films such as *Machine-Gun Kelly* (1958), *A Bucket of Blood* (1959), or *Little Shop of Horrors* (1960) – has been labeled as “a horror *auteur* of enormous significance, more specifically identified as a major reinterpreter of Poe” (Punter 97). Again targeted at a teenage audience, these darkly ironic and macabre films not only put the American Gothic horror film back on the map, exploiting the film medium’s extraordinary potential to visualize the Gothic in due form; but at the same time, they also helped promote and secure Poe’s legacy among the younger generation. It is important to note, however, that with the exception of *House of Usher* and *The Masque of the Red Death* (both rather faithful adaptations in that they stick to the basic storylines of the original short stories), Corman’s Poe films were either only inspired by Poe’s original tales, reusing well-known elements; presented a bricolage of a number of his stories; or had only the title in common with the original work (which is why it would actually be more appropriate to use the term “adaptations” with quotation marks).

Corman has claimed that *House of Usher*, the first film in the series, had been his suggestion to AIP’s executive producers, James H. Nicholson and Samuel Z. Arkoff. By his own account, he had wanted to do a classic and instead of making another two low-budget, black-and-white horror films for them, he had thus come up with the idea to adapt Poe’s same-titled short story about “the last insane days of Roderick and Madeline Usher” (Corman 78). Unlike in previous productions, Corman had a much higher budget at his disposal this time, allowing him greater creative possibilities. In his autobiography, he has stated: “I was ready to move on to bigger, better movies on longer schedules and to direct more experienced actors from better scripts. The chance to do all those things came in the visually and thematically rich gothic horror genre” (Corman 77). To avoid repeating AIP’s hitherto successful concept that was beginning to wear out, at least in Corman’s view (cf. Dixon, *Second Century*, 82), and to go along with a new trend – and of course to be able to match up to Hammer’s highly successful color movies – *Usher*, like the rest of the series, was to be filmed in color (Technicolor) and CinemaScope; which most likely increased its audience appeal considerably at the time, especially with young viewers. The excessive use of color (red in particular) in *House of Usher* and the subsequent Poe films not only gave them a flamboyant, but also a fairly surreal because somewhat artificial look, throwing into relief the Gothic’s penchant for (visual) excess and artificiality.¹⁷³ Significantly, the screenplay for

¹⁷³ In his intriguing chapter on “The Ghost of the Counterfeit,” Jerrold E. Hogle has pointed out how “extreme fakery” (in whatever form) as “an element basic to the Gothic tradition” has pervaded the mode ever since its emergence with Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, including the works of Poe (105).

House of Usher, which was written by Richard Matheson, who would also script the screenplays for *Pit and the Pendulum*, *Tales of Terror*, and *The Raven*, “had many of the elements that became standard fare for the Poe films” (Corman 78).

Pit and the Pendulum, Corman’s second “AIPoe” film, which was an even greater commercial success than *House of Usher* and together with it paved the way for the rest of the series (see chapters 5.1. and 5.2. for detailed analyses of both films), bore hardly any resemblance to Poe’s original tale. In fact, its basic storyline and character constellation were rather reminiscent of that of *House of Usher*: an outsider visits an uncanny mansion, inhabited by an enigmatic aristocrat and his sister, and tries to uncover the mysterious events taking place. Poe’s story, set entirely in an Inquisitorial torture chamber and revolving solely around the protagonist’s first-person account of the pit-and-pendulum torture, merely served as the film’s grand finale to which the complexly constructed rest of the film amounts. As James H. Nicholson put it: “Poe writes the first reel or the last reel; Roger does the rest” (qtd. in Dixon, *Second Century*, 67). The Hammer-style (although more subtle because showing less), Grand-Guignol-flavored graphic violence of the movie – so different from the suggested horror of Tourneur, but in fact dating back to such visually explicit early Gothic works as Lewis’s *The Monk* – also surpassed that of Poe’s work; though not necessarily in terms of the gruesome feel that is conveyed.¹⁷⁴ In fact, Corman’s Poe films became increasingly violent and graphic. According to Worland, “[between] the startling innovations of *Psycho* (1960) and the end of censorship in 1968,” the film “epitomized the increasing tension between graphic violence and submerged sexuality in Hollywood horror” (“AIP’s *Pit*,” 283-84).

The year 1962 in fact saw two “AIPoe” releases: *Premature Burial* and *Tales of Terror*; the former occupying an exceptional position in the Poe cycle. In contrast to the previous two films, the screenplay for *Premature Burial*, a story about a man’s paranoia of being buried alive and the dreadful consequences of his gradual descent into madness, only loosely based on Poe’s original text, was written by Charles Beaumont and Ray Russell. Moreover, since Vincent Price was not available at the time, the lead was now played by Ray Milland, whose rather low-key performance formed a strong contrast, but was in no way inferior to that of his fellow actor. Despite the new scriptwriters and cast, this highly claustrophobic film shared the feel as well as a great deal of the (visual) elements and stylistic devices of the first two films, following the same well-tried formula. With a nod to Poe,

¹⁷⁴ In his fascinating book *A New Heritage of Horror*, David Pirie has argued that the English penchant for graphic violence (what he has termed “English sadism” or “Selwynism”), which has always been a key element of English Gothic literature, also dominated English Gothic cinema, more precisely the Gothic motion pictures made by Hammer (cf. 6). It is thus fair to say that, as the American counterpart to Hammer horror, Corman’s Poe films brought this quality of “English sadism” or “Selwynism” to the U.S.

Premature Burial also featured experiments with a galvanic battery – immediately calling to mind the laboratory and Frankenstein’s experiments in Whale’s 1931 film version – which Corman used to great effect. In this connection, a great optical effect is worth mentioning: when the neurotic protagonist electrocutes one of his opponents, Corman visualizes this in an eerie shadowplay on a wall rather than by directly showing the victim. When *Premature Burial* turned out to be less successful than the first two adaptations, however, Corman realized that “the formula had to be varied” (84). For his next Poe film, Corman relied on the talents of Matheson again. Following the vogue for anthology films prevalent in Europe at the time, *Tales of Terror* was composed of three independent parts based on Poe’s short stories “Morella;” a combination of “The Black Cat” and “The Cask of Amontillado,” possibly alluding to *The Tell-Tale-Heart* as well; and “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar.” Each introduced by the vexing sound of a beating heart and a narrating voice-over by Price and ended by a powerful quote from the original tales (a frequent feature in Corman’s Poe films), the three stories starred a trio of Gothic horror icons: Price, Peter Lorre, and Basil Rathbone, all of whom delivered excellent performances. While “Morella” looked like a mini version of Corman’s first two films in the series, “The Black Cat” was a black comedy, which “blended humor with the macabre” (Corman 84). With “The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar,” Corman added a particularly gruesome story of hypnosis and suspended animation to the package.

Corman and Matheson’s next project was *The Raven*, a highly entertaining Gothic horror comedy, which was supposed to give a fresh impetus to the Poe series. Revolving around three rivaling sorcerers (played by Price, Karloff, and Lorre in particularly hilarious performances), the film bore hardly any resemblance to Poe’s original poem, except for a few lines quoted by Price in the beginning. Interestingly, rather than once again invoking and drawing solely on his previous Poe films, Corman incorporated an obvious parody of Browning’s *Dracula*: not only is Karloff’s entrance staged like that of Lugosi’s *Dracula* (keeping in mind that Karloff and Lugosi used to be rivals), but he also utters the famous line “I bid you welcome.” *The Raven* was followed by *The Haunted Palace*, which was in fact based on H.P. Lovecraft’s *Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and had nothing to do with Poe except that it took its title and a few lines from one of his poems. When AIP asked for more Poe pictures, Corman decided to add two more films to the cycle, despite his feeling that “the formula was starting to get stretched” (87). *The Masque of the Red Death* was the seventh and most lavish film in the series and closer to Poe’s original work again while at the same time

incorporating elements from Poe's tale "Hop Frog."¹⁷⁵ Written by R. Wright Campbell and Charles Beaumont, who had also scripted the screenplay for *The Haunted Palace*, this "surreal, philosophical tale set in medieval Italy" (Corman 87) tells the story of a particularly cruel and sadistic Satanist (an addition to Poe's tale) by the name of Prospero, who gives a ball for the nobility while the peasantry is visited by the plague (the Red Death) and killed by Prospero's men as a precautionary measure. Despite its basic adherence to Poe's tale, thus also featuring the seven differently colored rooms, Corman's much more sinister version rather foregrounded the perverse evil of Prospero and the debauched excesses of the party, thus intensifying the Gothic quality of Poe's text. The film's ending was particularly uncanny: in contrast to Poe's tale, which ends with the prince and his guests dying upon unmasking the Red Death, Corman's film added an epilogue in which the Red Death was shown meeting with other, differently colored Deaths after completing his task, which implied that this story was only one among many, putting it "en abîme."

The Poe cycle ended with *The Tomb of Ligeia*, which revolves around a man and his new wife being haunted by the ghost of the deceased former wife. With a screenplay by Robert Towne, this film was quite different from the others even though it also featured some of the stalwart Gothic devices, such as the haunted castle and the return of the dead. Not only was it filmed in England and with a mostly English cast (like *The Masque of the Red Death*), but, shot on real locations, it also featured numerous extensive outdoor scenes in bright sunlight, which gave the film a more realistic touch; for the first time, Corman thus broke with his well-trying, but by now hackneyed concept. The source material's theme of necrophilia was expanded, and the protagonist's obsession was also elevated to a higher degree, Price's performance being as attuned and powerful as ever (this time wearing odd dark sunglasses to emphasize his fragile condition).

A very skilled cinematician, Corman always made his films at a tremendous pace, sometimes needing only a few days to shoot an entire movie and producing up to eight motion pictures a year – something he became famous for. He thus often finished his films ahead of schedule, which obviously saved the studio a good deal of money. Unsurprisingly, he soon gained a reputation for being "an artist who happens to be an astute businessman, rather than simply a commercial filmmaker" (Dixon, *Second Century*, 80). He also always managed to keep well within and make the best of the budget, for example, by reusing sets from previous

¹⁷⁵ Corman had actually wanted to adapt "The Masque of the Red Death" much earlier. However, since Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal*, which seemed to also have been inspired by Poe's tale, had only been released in 1957, Corman was concerned that he might be accused of copying Bergman; therefore, he postponed the project (cf. Corman 87).

films. In the case of the Poe cycle, for instance, Corman always reused both sets and footage from the previous adaptations for each subsequent film (one time, he actually made an entirely new film, *The Terror* (1963), on the leftover sets of *The Raven*)¹⁷⁶. As a result, having more and more Gothic sets at hand, the look of the Poe films became increasingly lavish. Hence Peeples remark that “Corman certainly knew how to make a visual impact despite modest budgets” (137).

What is probably most intriguing about the Poe cycle from a Gothic studies point of view is that with the help of accomplished screenwriters such as Beaumont and Matheson, in particular, “who certainly understood the tropes of Poe’s Gothic world” (Kavka 224), Corman, who was obviously quite adept in the Gothic himself (he had also read Poe with great enthusiasm as a youth), not only expanded Poe’s mostly very short tales in order to turn them into full-length feature films, often using the Poe story as the climax; but in doing so, he in fact amplified their Gothic character. First and foremost, this was achieved by augmenting the source material, for example, by incorporating a multitude of classic Gothic tropes and devices, by fusing familiar Gothic ingredients and key elements from the collected works of Poe, and by adding conventional (audio-)visual horror elements from previous Gothic films to enhance the Gothic atmosphere. For instance, regardless of Poe’s original settings, almost all of Corman’s films featured the most popular of all (American) Gothic settings: the isolated, bleak castle or family mansion (in some cases also representing the family line), usually located within a sublime and melancholy landscape à la Radcliffe and complete with gloomy subterranean vaults, secret passageways, or crypts with prematurely interred bodies (typically female), which houses a terrible secret that haunts its walls and envelops it in mystery (cf. Williams 39).

The mise-en-scène of Corman’s films, especially his stylish and richly decorated settings, which frequently emulated the subdued color scheme of the Hammer films and often gave special dominance to the color red, always evoked a particularly uncanny and claustrophobic atmosphere that was most often filled with an air of the past haunting the present. Moreover, the settings conveyed a strong sense of terror and foreboding, as if the venue itself was anticipating a dreadful event – what Ruthner has termed “*Latenz des Ortes*” (“latency of the locus”) and declared a key element of the horror film (38). In this respect, it is interesting to note that the films played intensively with light and dark or shadows to reflect

¹⁷⁶ As regards *The Terror*, Corman made the following interesting statement: “I was getting so familiar with the standard elements of Poe’s material – or at least our adaptations – that I tried to out-Poe Poe himself and create a gothic tale from scratch” (Corman 88). (The final screenplay was scripted by Corman, Leo Gordon, and Jack Hill; the film itself was shot by Corman and four other directors, some of them his protégés: Francis Ford Coppola, Monte Hellman, Jack Hill, and Jack Nicholson.)

and contrast the various shades of good and evil or rationalism and superstition, frequently moving from light (lighter settings) to dark (darker settings) as evil or (superstitious) delusion increasingly prevail. In general, abiding by Gothic tradition, the transgression or blurring of boundaries always played a central role in the films. The return of the dead or states of apparent death such as catalepsy (a Poe favorite), for example, blurred the line between life and death while the return of the past (sometimes in the form of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children) linked past and present. Corman's films, which often revolved around the disunity of families, showed a particular penchant for moral or sexual transgression and excess, such as the use of bestial violence (preferably against women, as mentioned before), incestuous relationships (Oedipal overtones included), and necrophilia – or a combination of all – which Corman took from Poe, but then intensified, most likely to cater to current popular taste. Moreover, variants of mental derangement (for example, obsession, dual personality, delusion, or paranoia), which blurred the line between sanity and insanity, frequently constituted a key ingredient and often functioned as the driving force behind the films' plots. Many of the Poe films also featured cases of premature burial (another Poe favorite); the ghostly return of the prematurely entombed representing the haunting return of the repressed to the protagonist's psyche.

In order to evoke the typically Gothic sublime atmosphere in his films, Corman (like Poe) incorporated moments with a high degree of obscurity and ambiguity; for example, by blurring the line between reality and illusion. He obviously liked to play with his audience by confronting the viewer with situations in which things are not what they seem – situations that often produce the effect of the fantastic in the Todorovian sense. For example, his films frequently feature seemingly supernatural events, such as ghostly hauntings. Corman's endings are also often quite ambiguous, sometimes downright unsettling, as in the cases of *Pit and the Pendulum* or *The Masque of the Red Death*; instead of providing a clear-cut resolution at the end, they deprive the viewer of closure, catharsis, and the conventional restoration of order. In addition to intriguingly composed, spine-tingling scores (many of them contributed by Les Baxter), Corman also liked to avail himself of trademark sound effects, such as thunderstorms or creaking doors, for dramatic effect and to increase the Gothic feel of his films. Moreover, he often employed stunning special or visual effects, such as electric discharges (*Premature Burial*); beams emanating from fingertips or a levitating person (*The Raven*); or spectacular make-up effects, for example, to show the gradual decomposition of a body ("The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"). The phantasmagoric flashbacks and dream (or rather nightmare) sequences – what Kawin has termed

“mindscreens” (cf. chapter 3) – which are featured in several of the Poe films, are particularly noteworthy. To create the oneiric look of these sequences, Corman used colored filters and applied gel to the lens for a blurry effect. As Ron Haydock has observed, these “usually bizarre, camera-distorted scenes ... actually came the closest in any of the films to capturing the authentic nightmare quality so prevalent in Poe’s tales of horror” (qtd. in Neimeyer, 218).

Through his skillful and elaborate use of the camera, in particular, his “aggressive dolly work” or his incessantly and often fast moving camera – again forming a stark contrast to Tourneur’s slow-paced films –¹⁷⁷ which “dragged [the audience] into the action” and produced an “atmosphere of mounting dread” (cf. Dixon, *Senses of Cinema*), Corman masterfully evoked and kept his audience in suspense. Corman had a penchant for a moving camera because he liked to build the tension as his characters moved. For this purpose, the point-of-view (POV) shot was a much-favored tool: Corman would place the camera in front of the actor, tracking back as he moved forward, and then use a POV reverse shot to reveal what the character sees, thus putting the audience in his position (cf. 80). Besides his “gliding,” “panning,” and “swooping” camera, he also made use of “jarring angles” to “sharpen the edge of tension and fear,” as Corman has explained (81). Of course, he also knew how to effectively edit his pictures, thereby frequently increasing the film’s pace, to heighten the level of tension for the viewer; all of his films feature great montage sequences.

One particularly effective visual technique, which intensified the claustrophobic and oppressive atmosphere of these Gothic films considerably, was Corman’s use of the anamorphic formats CinemaScope and Panavision,¹⁷⁸ especially with regard to scenes set in interiors. At the time, the widescreen format was usually employed on epic pictures to display grand (natural) spectacles and scenery – comparable to the descriptions or presentation of sublime landscapes in Gothic fiction or paintings (cf. chapter 2.1.) – and to thereby convey a sense of awe-inspiring vastness (and in the case of the Western, which was frequently shot in CinemaScope, perhaps a sense of freedom). According to Martin Halliwell, this new widescreen format – which reflected the general reorientation from a vertical to a horizontal seeing preference in the 1950s (cf. Grafe 163) – revolutionized both the construction of films and the cinematic experience of moviegoers. “When used with a heightened colour palette such as Technicolor ..., CinemaScope encouraged viewers to lose themselves in the epic

¹⁷⁷ It is interesting to note that from the 1960s onwards film in general not only became more visually graphic, but also faster-paced (cf. Monaco 196).

¹⁷⁸ CinemaScope, “an aesthetic EVOLUTION,” providing cinemagoers with “‘a full view’,” was introduced in 1953 and enthusiastically received by movie audiences (cf. Hillier, 270-74). As Robert Coughlan explained in the *LIFE* magazine issue of 20 July, 1953: “by means of a very wide, curving screen and special sound equipment it gives to audiences an immense panoramic picture with ‘depth-illusion’” (81).

spectacle” (Halliwell 150). Along the same lines, Barthes enthusiastically compared the viewing experience of CinemaScope to that of standing “on an enormous balcony”: the audience is absorbed and infused with “the euphoria of an equal amount of circulation between the spectacle and my body” (1st and 2nd par.).

Thus following a trend, Corman’s use of the widescreen format (often aided by the skillful cinematography of Floyd Crosby, who was involved in all but the last two “AIPoe” films), however, frequently went in a different direction and resulted in a contrary effect: in particular, by shooting interiors in CinemaScope or Panavision, he created a sublime sense of confinement, “of a vast space closing in on characters and audience alike” (Humphries 81). Because of the seeming spaciousness of the settings, Corman’s characters often convey the impression of being isolated or lost, perhaps even vulnerable. Corman thus also frequently positioned a group of characters in a certain way within these visually oppressive spaces to visualize their strained relationships to one another. As Bazin once aptly noted, much to his surprise, CinemaScope was particularly effective not in Western movies or other motion pictures which foregrounded vast spaces, but in so-called psychological films (qtd. in Grafe, 163).

Because of his penchant for (Freudian)¹⁷⁹ psychoanalysis (cf. Corman, 77ff.), Corman worked out and put special emphasis on the psychological aspects of Poe’s stories,¹⁸⁰ such as the sins of the fathers haunting the present generation and the return of the repressed (past) in general (often figured as the return of the dead) as well as (the resulting) conditions of madness or delusion – tropes frequently encountered in Gothic fiction.¹⁸¹ Explaining his approach to *House of Usher*, Corman has stated: “I felt that Poe and Freud had been working in different ways toward a concept of the unconscious mind, so I tried to use Freud’s theories to interpret the work of Poe” (78). By his own account, he also availed himself of his knowledge of Freud’s dream interpretations to add “an unconscious, symbolic plane” to the film. To emphasize his focus on the inner workings of the deranged mind and the unconscious, Corman decided to set his Poe films mostly in interiors (cf. 81) – thus creating psychological spaces. Accordingly, these interiors were usually replete with heavy antique furniture, ancestral galleries, and medieval paraphernalia (for example, knight’s armors) as well as a good deal of cobwebs to convey a dark, haunted, claustrophobic, and old-fashioned

¹⁷⁹ It is interesting to note how Freud’s psychological writings have inspired Gothic horror ever since their emergence between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is quite possible that Corman was also inspired by two Poe adaptations from the 1930s, *The Black Cat* (1934) and *The Raven* (1935), featuring Karloff, which had “[capitalized] partly on public interest in the still relatively new field of psychiatry” (Neimeyer 217).

¹⁸⁰ As mentioned in chapter I.2.4.1., Poe was of the opinion that “terror is ... of the soul.”

¹⁸¹ Often, the trailers or ad campaigns for the films also alluded to Poe’s personal psychological issues (cf. Peeples, 136).

atmosphere. Production designer/art director Daniel Haller, who was involved in all eight “AIPoe” films, played an important part in the creation of these stylish, lavish-looking set designs, parts of which he had obtained from Universal (for instance, elaborately built stock sets and scenery). Corman wanted to avoid “reality” by all means. If he did have to use exteriors (some of which were shot on a soundstage because it gave them an unreal look), he normally wanted those scenes set at night and the exterior sets had to be somewhat “out of the ordinary” (81). Interestingly, by setting his films mostly in “claustrophobic interiors in the controlled environment of the studio,” Corman (consciously or not) “followed the tradition of expressionist films set in artificial, self-contained worlds” (Worland, “AIP’s *Pit*,” 288-29).

For one thing, the (interior of a) Gothic castle or family mansion with its many rambling and disorienting corridors, passageways, and vaults was thus meant to represent the protagonist’s tormented psyche. As Kavka has noted, “[the] spatialization of the frustrated, repressed psyche could not be more clear, since in [most of] these films the house has no practical function ... other than to serve as the master’s seat and hence, metaphorically, as the projection of his psyche” (224). In this regard, it is also interesting to consider Wood’s observation that the haunted or “terrible house” traditionally “represents an extension or ‘objectification’ of the personalities of the inhabitants” (at the same time also signifying “the dead weight of the past crushing the life of the younger generation, the future”) (Wood 129-30) – a statement that definitely applies to Corman’s Gothic house. For Corman, however, the castle or mansion simultaneously also served another – if related – purpose. When Arkoff initially expressed his concern about Corman’s first Poe film, asking him where the monster in *House of Usher* was (obviously a necessary prerequisite in his view), Corman replied: “the house is the monster” (78) – a concept he implemented in many of the films in the series. In fact (whether consciously or not is anyone’s guess), Corman was once again following a Gothic tradition: even first-wave Gothic fiction, such as Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, had already featured the castle as a particularly powerful figure; the castle being the “passive agent of terror,” which is not only home to, but whose origin is also dictating the nature of the “active agent” or villain (Pirie 2). In other words, the castle or mansion, which exerts a strong, noxious, even malign influence on its inhabitants, assumes the role of a fiend (at least in Corman’s films). All in all, then, the physical space of the monstrous house is equated with or functions as the psychological space of the monstrous psyche (as it is often the case in Gothic fiction in general).

In this connection, it is expedient to consider Michel Foucault’s concept of the “heterotopia” – that is, a microcosmic “other place,” a place “outside of all places,” a place

“without geographical markers” (Foucault 24-25) – because a heterotopic space is precisely what Corman’s Gothic house is. (In some cases, one could even read it as a “crisis heterotopia,” that is, a place “reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society and to the human environment in which they live, in a state of crisis” (Foucault 24)). Usually set within a gloomy landscape, it always seems to be strangely located somewhere outside the quotidian social world; cinematically, its heterotopic nature was further emphasized by (then state-of-the-art) sublime-looking matte shots, showing exterior views of the house, partly because of their somewhat surreal character. Corman was actually conforming to Gothic convention: as Botting has noted, the “main features of Gothic fiction ... are heterotopias: the wild landscapes, the ruined castles and abbeys, the dark, dank labyrinths, the marvellous, supernatural events, distant times and customs are not only excluded from the ... social world but introduce the passions, desires and excitements it [suppresses]” (9).

The often ruinous or decaying Gothic mansion with its labyrinthine, secret passageways and subterranean vaults, then, provided the perfect setting for Corman’s aristocratic, near-mad protagonist, who, isolated from the rest of the social and civilized world, is trapped both physically in his house and mentally in the hauntings of his psyche. By his own account, Corman has always been “attracted to stories about outcasts, misfits, or antiheroes on the run or on the fringe of society” (qtd. in Jancovich 276). For his Poe films, he found the perfect cast: with the exception of *Premature Burial*, all films starred Vincent Price, whom Corman regarded as “a man of cultural refinement” and a “first-rate actor” (Corman 78). Corman felt that “audiences had to fear the leading man but not on a conscious, physical level based on strength”; he “wanted a man whose intelligent but tormented mind works beyond the minds of others and who thus inspires a deeper fear” (78-79). Price met all of Corman’s requirements and managed to “[breathe] plenty of life and gothic horror into all the lines and action” (Corman 79). Like his British colleagues Cushing and Lee, Price, who had conquered the hearts of horror film fans with his performances in *House of Wax* (1953), *House on Haunted Hill*, or *The Tingler* (both 1959), also immediately became an icon of Gothic cinema and his name forever connected to that of Poe. Moreover, in Kavka’s view “the principal representative of horror film in the 1960s and 1970s,” Price “became synonymous with a new kind of Gothic protagonist: the introspective, pathological hero whose monstrosity lies within” (224). His signature presentation of the tormented, doom-laden, ‘melodramatic madman’ (cf. Jancovich 271) or the defiant villain, more than once embodying both villain and victim at the same time; his skillful generating of “a subtle, understated sense of menace – madness masked by a polite, polished veneer” (Clark 90); as

well as his often campy acting style (recalling the highly theatrical and melodramatic protagonists of first-wave Gothic fiction) raised his fame and turned him into a star – who would actually have his last cameo appearance in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* in 1990 (cf. chapter 6.1.).

Apropos camp: although, in an interview with Nick Fennell, Corman rejected the term “campy” to describe Price's acting style (cf. Fennell), the adjective, as defined by Susan Sontag, seems indeed perfectly applicable to Price's performances. According to Sontag, the essence of “camp” (a sensibility, a “certain mode of aestheticism” and thus linked to the visual) is “its love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration;” its “hallmark ... is the spirit of extravagance.” Having its origins, among other things, in the Gothic novel and the Gothic revival of the eighteenth century (quelle surprise!), it consists in “the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve.” Sontag put a strong emphasis on the latter: in her view, camp “rests on innocence,” that is, it is “art that proposes itself seriously” even if it “cannot be taken altogether seriously because it is ‘too much’.” All things considered, then, Price's acting style fits Sontag's description of camp like a glove: his performance in the Poe films was highly theatrical to the point of exaggeration, extravagant, and passionate, but it was also always meant quite seriously. On a general note, taking Price's campy performances as well as the use of color and widescreen formats in these films into consideration, one could easily argue that Corman's Poe movies are altogether quite campy in that they indulge in various forms of (visual) excess (a form of exaggeration) that is characteristic for the Gothic, which generally likes to transgress boundaries.

Over the years, not least due to Price's extraordinary performances, Corman's “AIPoe” films have gained cult status. Punter has explained their success as follows: affording “intellectual relief” in a way similar to the original Gothic novel, they “permit their audience to acknowledge its own intelligence and reasonableness before deliberately abandoning it.” In his view, “Corman's films work through a dialectic of response. That is to say, they appear to be appealing to the terrible, and to a certain extent they are; but they are also appealing to shared assumptions about the limitations of terror, and thus are self-ironising in a way which earlier Gothic films were not” (107). The fact that Corman's films intensified the Gothic quality of Poe's original tales considerably, especially with regard to graphic violence and (visual) excess, was probably another reason for their great appeal with audiences. In summary, it can thus be said that, on the one hand, the Poe cycle has clearly helped the preservation of Poe's legacy; on the other hand, because the films often differ substantially from the original texts, they have conveyed a fairly distorted image of Poe's

work. Nevertheless, having become part of the popular imagination, they have influenced many subsequent filmmakers – including Tim Burton (cf. chapter 6) – and thus shaped Gothic cinema to a considerable extent.

5.1. The Monstrous House: *House of Usher* (1960)

I heard her first feeble movements in the coffin ... we had put her living in the tomb!
(Tagline for *House of Usher*)

*Two pale drops of fire guttering on the vast, consuming darkness: my sister and myself.
Shortly they will burn no more.*
(Roderick Usher)

In the doom-laden atmosphere of an apparently dead forest, shrouded in wafts of mist, a well-dressed young gentleman on horseback suddenly appears in the far distance and, carefully making his way through the wasteland, gradually approaches the camera. As he comes to a halt, the camera cuts to a Caspar-David-Friedrich-like establishing shot of a gloomy, decaying Gothic mansion, surrounded by a foggy swamp with dead trees (a matte painting), allowing the viewer to share in the man's first, truly sublime view of the (almost screen-filling) moribund House of Usher. Cutting back to a medium close-up of the man, the viewer gets the impression that both man and horse are nervous as they hesitate before accomplishing the rest of the way. The sense of foreboding that is evoked is further emphasized by heavy, dissonant music. Finally, the man plucks up his courage and rides across the fog-shrouded, desolate Usher premises, past an old, cobwebbed iron gate that reveals the family name in once golden letters (a sign of former glory), towards the mansion.¹⁸²

Thus begins Roger Corman's first in a series of eight highly atmospheric films made for AIP, also known as the "Poe cycle," which initiated the revival of Hollywood Gothic when it was released in the summer of 1960. The first minutes of the film (which are in fact quite close to the beginning of Poe's original tale) already clearly reveal that this is a Gothic film: set in the classic, heterotopic setting of the ominous Gothic house, located in an equally uninviting and sublime environment, which reflects the psychological landscape and, in this case, also the morbid physical condition of its inhabitants,¹⁸³ the film opens with the arrival of the hero Philip Winthrop (Mark Damon), who has come for his fiancée Madeline Usher (Myrna Fahey), the sister of Roderick Usher (Vincent Price). From the beginning, however,

¹⁸² Corman had actually filmed this exterior opening sequence, which was supposed to have a "stark fantasy look," at the scene of a forest fire in the Hollywood Hills. After the firemen had put out the fire, he returned with a crew and Mark Damon, the second male lead, the next day to shoot. As Corman remembers: "I got exactly what I wanted: to not show green grass, leafy trees, or any other organic signs of life. The film was about decay and madness" (81).

¹⁸³ In his essay "Exercise in Psychogeography," Guy Debord declared Poe as psychogeographical in landscape, psychogeography referring to "the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals" ("Introduction to a Critique of Urban Geography"). In accordance to Poe, the landscapes in Corman's Poe films are equally psychogeographical.

his visit is ill-fated. Winthrop not only learns from Bristol, the butler (Harry Ellerbe), that Madeline is ill and confined to her bed; but for some mysterious reason, her domineering brother has also strictly forbidden any visitors to enter the house, thus preventing the young lovers' reunion. (Since the introduction of an outsider always involves the danger of exposing the protagonist(s)'s long-kept secret and perhaps its destruction, as Worland has noted (cf. "AIP's *Pit*" 290), Usher's rejection makes perfect sense.) Of course, as becomes a Gothic hero, Winthrop ignores all warning signs and insists on entering the lion's den – not knowing what he is getting himself into.

Interestingly, by adhering to the overall storyline and gloomy tone of Poe's Gothic tale (a man visits the decaying House of Usher and becomes a witness of unspeakable events taking place within its walls) while at the same time adding certain conventional Gothic elements to it and modifying a few of its (basic) conditions, Corman together with screenwriter Matheson in fact amplified the Gothic character of the source material. For example, in Corman's film, Winthrop (Poe's unnamed narrator) does not visit the House of Usher upon a request by his dear friend Roderick, as Poe had conceived it; but he comes all the way from Boston (in contrast to Poe's original tale, the setting is thus distinctly American) for Roderick's sister Madeline Usher, his fiancée. Thus, a romance is added (which surely also served to increase audience appeal). This romantic bond, however, is subverted in a truly Walpolean fashion by Madeline's possessive (and now much older, in fact, father-like) brother, who apparently nurtures amorous feelings for Madeline himself and thus regards Winthrop as an intruder. As Worland has noted, "making the film's male outsider Madeline's suitor actually brings Roderick's sexual jealousy into sharper relief" ("AIP's *Pit*," 287). The triangular relationship between the three characters is thus completely altered and much more complex in Corman's version: in addition to the added love relationship between Winthrop and Madeline, Winthrop and Usher are no longer friends, but rivals; which not only adds more tension to the story, but also means a shift in interests. In other words, conflict is bound to occur. Moreover, Usher's incestuous inclinations towards his sister (a familiar Gothic convention), which might indeed be hinted at in Poe's story, are rather obvious in Corman's film, rendering Usher's appearance even more monstrous as he becomes a transgressor of moral boundaries.

From the very first moment of Winthrop's setting foot in Corman's House of Usher, there is something odd about the place, which is imbued with an atmosphere of mustiness, claustrophobia, and discomfort – not least due to its antique furnishing and medieval décor, including Persian carpets; candle stands and chandeliers; enormous portraits; big wooden

chests; and miniature statues; all dominated by the color red (a master stroke by production designer Daniel Haller and set decorator Dick Ruben). In the entrance hall, unpenetrated by natural light (a sign of the Usher's marooned state), Winthrop is not only asked to take off his boots – a necessary measure, as is later revealed, since Roderick Usher suffers from an inherited “acuteness of the senses”; but he is also taken aback when in a fairly uncanny moment he suddenly realizes that the butler has vanished mysteriously. How lost and out of place Winthrop is in the House of Usher is demonstrated by means of a clever visual technique: exploiting CinemaScope, Corman (aided by the superb cinematography of Floyd Crosby) uses an establishing shot to show Winthrop standing in the center of the huge hall. Because of the widescreen format, which allows a panoramic view of the hall in its entirety, Winthrop appears small and lost (both in the house and on screen) within its dark and heavy wooden architecture. The fact that he is gazing up as if in astonishment further emphasizes his appearance, making him look even smaller.

Winthrop's first encounter with Roderick Usher is no less discomforting. Not only does Usher repeatedly warn Winthrop to better leave the house, but he also tells him that his engagement to Madeline was a mistake. A tall man of light blond hair and dressed in a bright red housecoat, Usher not only forms a stark visual contrast to the relatively short, dark-haired Winthrop in his blue dress, but is also his opposite in many other respects. While Winthrop, who seems quite sure of himself, is of a rather calm and rational disposition, Usher is highly sensitive and emotional (as reflected in Price's highly campy performance); or as Jancovich described him, he is a ‘melodramatic madman,’ who is “morbidly aware of [his] own psychic vulnerability” (271). Usher also believes that his family line is haunted by a hereditary disease – a conviction he has expressed in a rather obscure, red-colored painting, obviously representing the House of Usher, which evokes an uncanny sense of doom – causing him “an infliction of the hearing, sounds of any exaggerated degree cut into my brain like knives.” In other words, the two represent the classic Gothic opposition of reason and rationalism (Winthrop) versus superstition (Usher).

Winthrop soon learns the – alleged – reason why Roderick is so concerned about their engagement. With a grave face (one of the great moments of Price's campy acting), Usher explains that “the Usher line is tainted;” that he and Madeline are dying. Were the circumstances different, Usher asserts (perhaps a little too hypocritically), he would welcome Winthrop “joyously” into the family. Usher compares Madeline and himself, who are both suffering from “a morbid acuteness of the senses,” to “figures of fine glass: the slightest touch and we may shatter.” He also informs Winthrop that three quarters of his family “have fallen

into madness and in their madness have acquired a superhuman strength so that it took the power of many to subdue them.” As Punter has put it, he is thus “trying to impose a schema of rationalism on the events with which he is confronted” (106). As the conversation proceeds, however, the idea more and more suggests itself that his appalled reaction may not only be a matter of friendly concern, but also attributable to his jealousy of Winthrop. A strong sense of ambiguity is thus evoked, leaving the audience with mixed feelings as to whether Usher can be trusted or not. It also seems increasingly likely that Usher is using the alleged family disease as an excuse to keep Madeline within the walls of the family mansion – and thus to himself – as they are connected by the same fate. Winthrop, for his part, is skeptical towards his fiancée’s brother and remains uninhibited and unperturbed by his account, which he believes to be an “exaggeration.” His suggestion at one point to light a candle to bring “some light” into the house – obviously a metaphor – clearly reflects his determination to get to the bottom of things, that is, to provide enlightenment. Seeing no alternative, Usher tries to intimidate Winthrop to get him out of the way, warning him that whatever consequences Winthrop’s refusal to leave might have will be on his conscience alone – another (friendly?) warning that Winthrop naturally refuses.

It is not long before Winthrop gets a good foretaste of the horrors that await him. In fact, a series of events that produce the effect of Todorov’s fantastic begins. While a candlestick in his room, which suddenly begins to move mysteriously as if by an invisible hand (shown in a close-up to increase the uncanniness of the moment), turns out to be nothing but the result of an earthquake-like tremor shaking the building, this alarming tremor itself appears to be connected to the seemingly inexorable decay of the House of Usher. Corman nicely visualizes the disintegration of the mansion. For example, when Winthrop takes a look out of his window, he discovers a long fissure running along the outside wall (which in Poe’s tale is only “barely perceptible”) – here, Corman employs another sublime matte painting, which shows part of the decaying, moon-lit building against a turbulent night sky (shown from a dramatic low angle, the building appears particularly awe-inspiring). The tendrils that once grew on the walls have died and are now covered by cobwebs, which might be a sign of the mansion’s noxious aura. In another shot, Corman pans along the fissure in a close-up, thus allowing a close look at the ramshackle wall. As Winthrop touches it, it crumbles beneath his fingers. Consequently, the viewer is led to believe that Usher’s stories about the gradual demise of his family, reflected in the decay of the family mansion, may have been true after all.

Only moments later, Winthrop finds himself in a first truly dangerous situation. On his way down to the dining hall, the mansion suddenly begins to tremble again. The camera cuts to a close-up of a chandelier with lit red candles, which is hanging from the ceiling in the otherwise dark entrance hall and still moving alarmingly from the tremor before. Through the chandelier, Winthrop is shown appearing on the gallery and then descending the stairs. As he continues his descent – accompanied by a crescendo of menacing music, which conveys a strong sense of foreboding – the rumbling noise is heard again and the chandelier begins to shake. Quickly crosscutting between the shaking chandelier and Winthrop, who will shortly pass underneath it – one of Corman’s great visual strategies to evoke suspense – it is made quite clear what will happen next: as Winthrop reaches the bottom of the stairs, the chandelier crashes down. Throwing himself to the side, however, Winthrop can save himself at the last minute. While Madeline, who has just arrived on the scene with her brother and Bristol, immediately rushes to his help, suggesting that he should “leave this place” for his own safety, Roderick seems less worried; in fact, the rather arrogant look on his face is probably one of the reasons why Winthrop decides to stay. When later at the dinner table Winthrop suggests in his typical know-it-all manner (and perhaps a little testing) that it was probably the trembling of the house that caused the chandelier to fall (although it seems that he is rather trying to convince himself) and that Usher should have it repaired – not “for future generations of Ushers,” as Roderick sarcastically inquires, but for Madeline’s safety – Usher insinuates that he ascribes Winthrop’s near-accident to other causes. However, before he can enlighten their guest (and thus the viewer), Madeline puts a stop to him. That way raising the level of obscurity, Corman increases the already disquieting atmosphere and keeps the audience in suspense.

The extremely awkward, triangular relationship between the three grows more and more tense. Torn between jealousy of Winthrop and more-than-brotherly affection for his sister, Roderick appears deeply bothered by his future brother-in-law’s presence. Madeline, who obviously knows more than she admits, seems to be concerned that Winthrop might learn the truth about certain things in the house. And Winthrop, still unperturbed, successfully continues to ignore all warning signs and displays an incredible, unhealthy ignorance. In one scene, in particular, Corman (again putting the panoramic effect of CinemaScope on display) nicely visualizes this triangular relationship in a fascinating establishing shot: Winthrop, Madeline, and Roderick have adjourned to the living room (Usher makes sure that the two are never alone). Oddly positioned in a triangle – Madeline is seated rigidly on a sofa to the left, Winthrop is standing by the windows at the back of the room with a cup in his hand, and

Roderick is seated to the right, plunking his lute dissonantly (which increases the level of discomfort) – they do not communicate, but every one of them is standing or sitting in isolation. They also do not face each other, but the camera instead. Eventually, Winthrop walks over to Madeline, and Corman presents an intriguingly edited montage (by Anthony Carras) of close-ups showing the three scrutinizing each other. The tension is further increased when Roderick decides in a rather apodictic and authoritarian manner that Madeline must now retire – thus putting a stop to a potentially romantic evening; then once again advises Winthrop to depart; and when the young man replies that he will not leave without Madeline, simply walks out on him. This scene makes it abundantly clear that this insalubrious triangular constellation is bound to end in disaster. The next shot, showing the anterior view of the fog-shrouded House of Usher – the same matte painting as in the film's beginning, which Corman intermittently inserts as a transition between scenes, not only calling to mind the house's heterotopic and desolate state, but, exploiting CinemaScope, also its sublime nature – where the last light is extinguished for the night, further emphasizes this: the darkness (of the night) inexorably closes in – both literally and figuratively.

Despite Usher's many attempts to keep the two lovers apart, Corman of course does not deprive his audience of a passionate encounter between Winthrop and Madeline. Yet, even this scene, in which Winthrop sneaks into Madeline's room at night (and is caught by Roderick), is overshadowed by darkness, suggesting that their romance will never have a happy ending. On the one hand, Madeline has a strong sense of doom ("you've never seen in the heart of this horrible house") from which she seems to see no escape. On the other hand, Usher's permanent, controlling presence as well as his manipulative way of talking his sister into believing in and accepting the Usher family's inevitable decay is trying their romantic relationship. Appealing to Madeline's conscience not to forget their inextricably linked fates, Usher (ignoring Winthrop's presence) makes it quite clear to her that her life is not her own and that she cannot leave – thus indicating that she is a (his) prisoner. All of a sudden, however, Madeline begins to show skepticism and resistance, noting that she only knows what he told her; that is, she indirectly accuses him of manipulation. Usher realizes the precariousness of the situation and desperately tries to convince her that, loving her "more than anything in the world," it was his love for her that inspired his actions. Once again, the viewer is left with an ambiguous picture: perhaps, Usher is the typical Gothic villain; but he might also be genuinely concerned about his sister's wellbeing and afraid of losing her, inducing the viewer to pity him. In any case, despite Usher's efforts and probably also due to his relentless attempts to get rid of Winthrop, Madeline turns away from her brother at the end

of the scene. It is clear that Usher has irretrievably lost his sister – which evokes a vague premonition of what is to come.

Unsurprisingly, Winthrop's stay in the House of Usher grows increasingly distressing and dangerous for him, as he is confronted with more and more strange and uncanny events; creaking doors shutting mysteriously as if by an invisible hand (a traditional horror film device Corman uses to create suspense) being the least of his worries. Yet, instead of surrendering, he confidently continues his investigations. Not only does Winthrop escape further near-accidents in the ramshackle staircase or by Bristol's kitchen fire by the skin of his teeth, both caused by the mansion's incessant decay; but he is also faced with the challenge of enduring and counteracting his fiancée's restrictive physical and mental condition. As he learns – rather cruelly, by coming upon her in a death-like state in the Usher's gloomy chapel one night – Madeline has been a somnambulist ever since her return from Boston. Moreover, she does not eat properly and is still convinced that her fate is sealed. Madeline's behavior is increasingly trying Winthrop's patience, which induces him to treat her like a stubborn child, telling her that he will have “no scrawny woman” in his house and scolding her for her superstitious views. In other words, he is beginning to take over from Usher in terms of dominating her. Eventually, Madeline realizes that there is only one way to convince her fiancé of the truth of her accounts: he must see the family crypt.

For the first time now, the film descends into the dark and claustrophobic subterranean vaults of the Usher mansion, complete with rats and cobwebbed medieval items such as knight's armors, which point to the mansion's age and history and thus evoke a strong sense of the past. The literal descent into the house's locked-away, shadowy depth, which is filled with an air that “nothing can survive ... long,” obviously also has a figurative meaning: it not only reflects the incipient penetration into its mysteries, but also a penetration of the Usher's collectively haunted psyche. Showing him the dusty, neatly arranged caskets of her deceased ancestors (all “victims” of the alleged hereditary disease), because she wants her fiancé “to see” (that is, to understand), Madeline heavy-heartedly informs Winthrop that there is also a casket waiting for her. Deeply appalled by this “monstrous” arrangement, Winthrop suspects her brother behind all this, even though Madeline tells him that there is also a casket for him, and once again implores her to “leave the dead to themselves” and to go away with him. As if to indicate that this has upset the dead (throughout the scene, ghostly howling voices are subtly audible in addition to the already eerie score, suggesting the ancestors' haunting presence), Corman has one of the caskets suddenly crash down from above, revealing skeletal remains. This is too much for Madeline and (like all classic Gothic heroines) she faints. As

Philip is about to carry her out of the crypt, Roderick suddenly appears. He is furious and blames Winthrop for the disaster.

Seeing no alternative and determined to convince Winthrop of the graveness of their situation once and for all, Usher eventually decides to let Winthrop (and the viewer) in on the family secret. On a balcony high above the foggy swamp (actually so foggy that the ground is not visible – an effective technique to hide the soundstage), Roderick tells Philip that the tarn surrounding the mansion is very deep; in fact, one of the Usher women drowned herself in it and was never found. Foreshadowing the film's end, Roderick adds that it was probably "deep enough to swallow this house entire." Winthrop then learns that the land surrounding the House of Usher was not always in such a bad condition, but that it was once fertile and beautiful, with fresh water and a flourishing flora and fauna – Usher is obviously talking about the Usher family as well. As often in his films, Corman visualizes this account in a picturesque oneiric flashbacks: as Usher provides Winthrop with this mental image, Corman's camera moves in on the fog, which immediately gives way to a fogged view of a beautiful, blossoming orchard through which the camera then tracks back before returning through the fog to the two men on the balcony. Usher continues that one day, however, "something crept across the land and blighted it," killing everything in the process: "a plague of evil." Again, Corman visualizes Usher's – rather vague – account, this time by cutting to and tracking through the deserted swamp shown at the beginning of the film; thus, in a way imitating the creeping of evil, but without actually showing anything. Interestingly, then, although on the one hand, Usher's choice of words seems to clearly point to his superstitious views, on the other hand, the viewer cannot be absolutely sure what is going on and whether there might not be supernatural forces at work after all.

To make the House of Usher's inevitable fall abundantly clear and, what is more, to demonstrate that there is no escape from "the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children" (a Gothic trope dating back to Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*), something Winthrop of course does not believe in, Roderick also shows his guest the Usher's ancestral gallery, which consists of five eerily stylized portraits. The young man learns that these members of the Usher family were dangerous criminals (thieves, murderers, or swindlers), some of them mad. Interestingly, like so many classic Gothic novels, all of these physiognomic paintings (which were contributed by artist Burt Schoenberg, including the one from the film's beginning showing the House of Usher), emphasize the sinister eyes of the portrayed – which makes sense considering that eyes are commonly regarded as windows to the soul. Roderick then changes the topic of the conversation to the house. While to Winthrop it is nothing but a

building, Usher is genuinely convinced that the house itself is malevolent and saturated by the trespasses of his forefathers: translocated from England to New England, it brought “with it every evil rooted in its stones.” A clear connection between the Usher family line and the House of Usher is thus made. In another great moment of Price’s melodramatic acting, Usher contends that “evil is not just a word, it is a reality. Like any living thing, it can be created. It was created by these people.” To emphasize the haunting atmosphere, Corman here quickly cuts to a series of close-ups of paintings while again employing ghostly howling voices suggesting the presence of the dead. “The history of the Ushers,” Roderick continues in an increasingly mad manner, “is a history of savage degradations, first in England, and then in New England – and always in this house, always in this house. The pall of evil which fills it is no illusion. For hundreds of years, foul thoughts and foul deeds have been committed within its walls.” When he finally concludes that “the house itself is evil now,” implying further that all of the strange little near-accidents Winthrop experienced before were probably brought about by nothing less than the house (which was precisely what Madeline had not wanted him to reveal earlier), one of Corman’s basic prerequisites is made explicit: the house is the monster (cf. Corman 78). Yet, Winthrop still remains disbelieving, and when Usher once again implores him not to take Madeline away, arguing that if she had children, the “Usher evil” would spread like a cancer, Winthrop is fed up. Tired of Roderick’s “sickened fancies,” he shouts at him furiously, ignoring his oversensitive ears. Calling him mad, he informs him that he and Madeline will leave immediately. Overwrought, Roderick breaks down, which Corman nicely visualizes by crosscutting between the eerie paintings and Usher holding his head in torment.

That the two lovers will in fact never be able to leave together and live happily ever after has been quite clear from the beginning. Thus, when a short while later, Corman shows an uncanny close-up of a hand opening the door to Madeline’s room and, soon after, she is dead, this comes as no great surprise. Since her brother was obviously the last one who saw her alive – Winthrop overheard a heated conversation about Madeline’s departure between them, which ended in her screaming horribly – the young man is convinced that it was his fiancée’s own brother who murdered her. What Winthrop, in contrast to Usher, does not know is that Madeline has simply fallen into a cataleptic, that is, death-like state (one of Poe’s favorites). To add insult to injury, without compassion for Winthrop’s already broken heart, Usher is cruel enough to talk him into believing that it was him who caused Madeline’s death. Usher now has advantage over Winthrop and seems quite self-satisfied, as he is obviously enjoying the moment and gloating at the young man’s suffering. In fact, this is the first time

that Winthrop shows signs of weakness and appears to be in an inferior position to Usher, which points to a reversal of roles between the two men – a clever strategy to keep the audience in suspense. Soon after, the three mourners have gathered in the gloomy chapel for Madeline's funeral. As Winthrop and Usher are once again caught in an argument about Roderick's superstitious beliefs, various close-ups of Madeline in her casket suddenly show her breathing and her hand twitching. While Winthrop does not realize it, Usher quickly closes the lid so as to prevent Winthrop from learning the truth. It is clear that Roderick is hoping to kill two birds with one stone: now that Madeline is presumed dead, Winthrop will surely depart soon and leave her to Usher. To hustle things on, Madeline's casket is then taken down to the family crypt and left with the others. Corman ends the scene with a wonderfully Gothic moment: zooming in on the name tag of Madeline's casket, she is heard breathing heavily inside, and obviously realizing that she has been entombed alive, she suddenly utters a bloodcurdling scream of horror.

At first, Usher's sinister plan seems to work out, as Winthrop, grief-stricken and haunted by guilt, is preparing his departure. A shot showing Winthrop descending the stairs in the entrance hall – in fact, the same shot as in the beginning, when Winthrop stood lost in its center – and his bidding Bristol goodbye suggest that this is the end of the film. But, of course, the best is still to come. When Bristol recapitulates the Usher's long history of illnesses to provide Winthrop with an explanation for Madeline's death in order to comfort him and accidentally mentions catalepsy, however, Winthrop suddenly realizes what has happened, and he sees through Roderick's foul scheming. Finding Madeline's casket empty in the crypt, he confronts Usher in a fury. For the first time, Winthrop actually loses his temper; in fact, he would even have killed Roderick if his good nature had only let him. Roderick eventually admits that he did bury his sister alive, claiming that it was necessary because she was doomed – something he genuinely believes and thus a clear sign of his gradual descent into madness – but that she is really dead now. As the tension is continuously building up and already pointing towards a climax in the near future, Corman once again foreshadows the film's final moments; this time by means of a fresh painting that Winthrop discovers on the easel in Usher's room. Obviously a portrait of Madeline and meant as a new addition to the ancestral gallery, the stylized, red-dominated painting shows an apparently female face with uncannily empty eye sockets, surrounded by what appears to be flames. Because the figure is positioned at the center of the fire, with flames emanating from its head like strands of long hair, the idea suggests itself that the figure is somehow connected to the fire.

In order to visualize Winthrop's distress, which manifests itself in a feverish nightmare, Corman employs another oneiric sequence consisting in a surreal collage of haunting images that reflect Winthrop's experiences of the past hours. To make clear that what is about to follow is only a dream, Corman dissolves from a shot showing Winthrop sleeping on his bed to the first shot of the nightmarish mindscreen. Using a combination of red and blue filters as well as wafts of fog, a blurred Winthrop is shown descending a surrealist flight of stairs through a vortex of fog; then walking through some sort of two-dimensional décor in an automaton-like manner; and then hastily descending further, seemingly endless flights of stairs before finally reaching what looks like the Usher chapel. Corman's fast-moving camera, his use of close-ups, and the tilted angles in this sequence help to increase the level of tension and distress. In the chapel, Winthrop is awaited by a horde of incarnate, mischievously grinning Ushers – among them the ones from the portraits in the ancestral gallery – and a similarly grinning Roderick Usher, who all seem to have gathered for a funeral. Once again, the howling voices, suggesting the ghostly presence of the dead, are audible. Combined with eerie music, they dominate the otherwise mute scene. Usher invites Winthrop to look at something, but fog is obstructing his view at first. Suddenly, Winthrop discovers with horror a skeleton in a casket. Turning around, however, he realizes that Usher has tricked him: while Winthrop has been staring at the skeleton, Roderick has tried to escape from the chapel with a death-like Madeline in his arms. Winthrop now desperately tries to get to them, but as he is held back by the crowd of ancestors, Usher only laughs at him. When Winthrop finally reaches the chapel door, it is too late, and the door is locked with chains. Calling out Madeline's name mutely, he tries to break the chains with an axe, which suddenly turns into a skeletal arm. He screams, again mutely, and turning, he finds himself face to face with a skeleton. The next shots show Roderick laughing at him and luring him to come closer, just like Usher's ancestors. Corman then cuts to Winthrop trying to break the chains of a casket with the axe. Throwing himself over the casket, the camera cuts to a close-up of Madeline inside, who suddenly opens her eyes and utters a now audible, piercing scream. It is from this scream that Winthrop finally awakes again.

Reflecting the atmosphere of dread and impending doom, the house is now caught in a thunderstorm – a highly effective and popular audio-visual element that Corman frequently availed himself of in order to build up tension, like so many other Gothic horror filmmakers before and after him. As Roderick, impassively and almost hopefully, notes while plunking his lute dissonantly: "The old house crumbles. Perhaps, this storm will finish it." He obviously expects the House of Usher – both mansion and family line – to perish very soon.

How affected by the thunderstorm his own health actually is, in particular, his sensitive senses, shows in the way he winces at every thunderbolt (whereas, oddly enough, he seems immune to the painful sound of his dissonant lute). It is thus hardly surprising that he only sneers at Winthrop when he threatens Usher with punishment for his deeds, sarcastically urging him to “arrange it quickly, then.” Now that Madeline is out of Winthrop’s reach and aware that Winthrop would not be capable of hurting him, the young man is no longer posing a threat to Usher. Roderick even mocks him, implying that due to his “logical mind,” Winthrop will never be able to comprehend the events that have been taking place. At this moment, the film thus makes explicit what has been suggested all along: in the House of Usher, superstition dominates reason and rationalism.

Corman not only uses thunder and lightning to convey a particular atmosphere or mood, however, but also to underline the horror of the moment: as Roderick unintentionally reveals to Winthrop that Madeline is still alive after all, that he not only could, but still can hear her breathing, gasping, screaming, and scratching in her casket – to great effect, Corman here employs fast crosscuts between the two men in Usher’s room and Madeline’s casket wrapped in chains below – his face is lit by lightning while thunder claps, emphasizing his monstrous nature. At the same time, the thunderstorm here also functions as *chiffre* for Madeline’s increasing rage, which will soon descend upon her brother. When Usher begins to describe how he can hear Madeline below, calling his name, it seems that he has now gone mad once and for all; the return of the repressed, that is, the live burial of his sister, mercilessly tormenting his soul. Price skillfully impersonates Usher in this truly Gothic moment of near-madness with a particularly campy performance. However, as Corman cuts to Madeline’s casket again, and her voice is indeed heard (eventually also by Winthrop) calling furiously for her brother while her bloody hand suddenly emerges from the casket, it appears that he might not be so mad after all; that is to say, at least he is not suffering from hallucinations. Leaving aside the fact that Usher is of course obviously suffering from a general mental derangement, it is interesting to note that his actions were indeed caused by the House of Usher – if indirectly: although the house itself might not be evil, it was Usher’s deranged perception of the house that made him do what he did. Since it was thus the house’s aura that manipulated his actions, Corman succeeds in presenting it as the monster. Consequently, although Usher has frequently appeared to be the classic Gothic villain (or “Fatal Man,” to use an expression coined by Pirie (4)), who driven by jealousy tries to rid himself of his rival to have the woman all to himself, he is after all only a victim of his own

delusions. As his other Poe films show, Corman had a penchant for this ambivalence; this perpetual transgression of the thin line between villain and victim.

Meanwhile, Madeline has somehow managed to escape from her blood-streaked casket, which Winthrop thus finds empty. Preparing his audience for the grand finale, Corman now combines thunder and lightning with the by now familiar sound of howling voices – this time representing Madeline’s ghostlike return – to underscore his highly suspenseful crosscuts between Usher in his room and Winthrop following Madeline’s bloody tracks in the underground vaults. It is already obvious that their paths (or narrative strands) will eventually cross again. While Usher is getting ready to face his sister, arming himself with a gun, Winthrop is shown making his way through the house’s secret, labyrinthine passageways; put differently, while Usher is reveling in superstitious anticipation in his room upstairs, Winthrop is following his investigative sense below. Suddenly, the thunderstorm causes the lights in Usher’s room to go out, which leaves him in a seemingly haunted darkness and thus increases the level of tension; as Burke once contended, obscurity is one way to evoke the sublime (cf. chapter 2.1.). Showing a close-up of Roderick’s head against the background of Madeline’s fiery portrait as both are lit by lightning, Corman not only creates a superbly uncanny image, but he also again foreshadows what is about to happen.

By now, Winthrop has discovered a secret door, which leads him straight into the dark room with the ancestral gallery. Frequently lit by lightning and underscored by the sound of thunder and howling voices, which again evoke an atmosphere of haunting, the portraits now appear even more sinister than before; as if the deceased Ushers were watching Winthrop’s every step. To increase the uncanny atmosphere, Corman repeatedly cuts to disturbing close-ups of the paintings. A long tracking shot along the floor and a close-up of a bloody doorknob reveal that Madeline’s bloody tracks have eventually lead Winthrop through the darkness to a door. As he is about to open it, however – the camera is now on the other side of the door, showing Winthrop’s head emerging through it – a bloody hand suddenly appears close to his head. The music crescendoing to a climax, Madeline is shown attacking Winthrop and strangling him on the floor. A highly uncomfortable extreme close-up of her wild eyes reveals that she has indeed gone mad, as Usher had proclaimed, and she does not recognize her fiancée, whom she holds down with a surprisingly powerful grip. Crosscut with close-ups of her ancestor’s portraits, with their equally disturbing eyes, it is suggested that the Usher curse has come true after all, resulting in another effect of the fantastic: it appears that Madeline has become just like her ancestors, who “in their madness [had] acquired a superhuman strength so that it took the power of many to subdue them,” as Usher had once told Winthrop.

While Winthrop is saved at the last minute by Bristol, who begs him to leave because the mansion's outside wall is already cracking, it is now Usher who is about to experience Madeline's mad fury firsthand. In a nicely composed shot, Corman shows her suddenly standing ghost-like in the dark in her brother's open window, her gown and long hair blowing in the wind in harmony with the long curtains. At first, Roderick seems pleased to see his sister; a look at her mad eyes (another extreme close-up), however, reveals that she has come to revenge herself – the return of the repressed in the flesh. Corman provides two further, skillfully visualized moments in which her madness clearly shows: at one point, Madeline suddenly doubles her bloody fists and screams piercingly while her ghost-like face is illuminated by a flash of lightning; moments later, Corman cuts to a highly disturbing blurry close-up of Madeline, who keeps approaching the camera slowly until she is too close and thus completely blurred. That the fall of the House of Usher is not only inevitable, but also imminent, becomes clear a short while later: the camera cuts to the fireplace from which flames are now quickly spreading along the walls to the window curtains, which Corman shows in a tracking shot. While the fire is rapidly gaining mastery over the entire house, Madeline and Roderick, the last descendants of the Usher line, become entangled in a life-and-death struggle. Meanwhile, a shot showing the outside wall of the mansion (the same matte painting that was used when Winthrop was looking out the window earlier) reveals that the crack has actually already broken off part of the house, which is now relentlessly crumbling and going up in flames. Eventually, before Madeline can kill her brother, the burning roof comes down on both of them, burying not only the two remaining Ushers, but also Bristol. Usher's latest painting, combining Madeline and fire, has become reality.

As Corman has noted, it was "a stroke of luck" that gave him this "spectacular fire sequence": by mere chance, the film crew had come across an old barn one day, which was to be demolished. Since it was to be destroyed anyway, Corman got the permission to burn it down instead (cf. 81). Due to its great visual effect, Corman in fact reused footage of this sequence in many of his subsequent Poe films. With a nod to Poe's original story, the visitor is the only one who survives the fall of the House of Usher. Realizing that all help is futile, Winthrop tries to at least save his own life, and he goes for the front door while the house is collapsing around him. Interestingly, as he reaches the door, it suddenly opens mysteriously, as if the house was letting him escape, and Winthrop manages to save himself. Once again, the film thus employs what Todorov defined as the fantastic, that is, a moment of hesitation as to whether the laws of nature still apply or not. Corman ends his films with another Caspar-David-Friedrich-like matte painting, which shows the monstrous House of Usher slowly

sinking into the fog-shrouded tarn to the tune of heavy, gloomy music. Superimposed on this sublime image, a powerful quote by Poe appears: “and the deep and dank tarn closed silently over the fragments of the House of Usher.”

5.2. Falling into the Abyss: *Pit and the Pendulum* (1961)

Until now no one has dared to film this ... the most diabolical classic of all time!

(Tagline for *Pit and the Pendulum*)

I will tell you where you are: you are about to enter hell.

(Don Medina)

In many respects, Corman's second Poe adaptation was obviously following the same formula as *House of Usher*. Like its predecessor, *Pit and the Pendulum* begins with a flamboyant play of colors, this time a variety of merging colored liquids spreading across the screen, which gives a good first impression of the film's excessive exploitation of Technicolor cinematography, again by Floyd Crosby. Following this introductory sequence, which, underscored by disturbing-sounding interjections, has been regarded as pointing to the film's evocation of psychological regression (cf. Worland, "AIP's *Pit*," 289), Corman opens his film with a medium close-up of a young man, Francis Barnard (John Kerr), who, dressed in medieval clothes, is riding in an open carriage along a sixteenth-century Spanish coast. This film, then, also begins with a young man's journey to a yet unknown place. Moments later, the signature shot (imitating Barnard's POV) of a fog-shrouded Gothic castle on top of a cliff in the distance, with boisterous waves crashing incessantly against its foot, reveals the carriage's destination; shown from a dramatic low angle, the castle appears particularly monstrous and awe-inspiring. As in *House of Usher*, Corman uses a matte painting to visualize the sublime gloomy castle and its heterotopic location (thereby avoiding a look of "reality"). That there is obviously something odd about the place becomes clear when the driver suddenly refuses to go any further to take the young man all the way to the castle. Recalling the very similar behavior of the coachman in *Dracula*, the driver is signaling "a clear boundary between the outer world and the essentially interior realm of gothic terror," as Worland has phrased it ("AIP's *Pit*," 289). Like Winthrop in *House of Usher*, however, Barnard ignores all warning signs and decides to continue his journey on foot.

Some time later, Barnard is shown standing at the same (if somewhat altered) cobwebbed, desolate front door where Winthrop once stood in Corman's first Poe film – due to budgetary reasons, the sets (including furnishings and décor) were frequently reused. And like in *House of Usher*, the uncanny score that helped create a sense of premonition in the first minutes of the film now ceases to the sound of wind howling in the trees. The similarities continue: a butler by the name of Maximilian (Patrick Westwood) opens the door and informs Barnard that the lord of the castle, Don Nicholas Medina (Vincent Price), does not receive any

visitors (a second warning), which Barnard of course ignores. Instead, he quite arrogantly insists on seeing Medina. Eventually, Medina's sister, Donna Catherine (Luana Anders), welcomes Barnard (if somewhat reluctantly), when she learns that he has come a far way (from London, as is later revealed) for his sister, who has recently passed away. As already becomes apparent, the basic storyline and character constellation of *Pit and the Pendulum* closely resembles that of *House of Usher*: a nobleman visits an uncanny mansion, inhabited by an enigmatic aristocrat and his sister, and tries to uncover the strange events that are taking place. All in all, *Pit and the Pendulum* was a much less faithful adaptation than *House of Usher*; it did, however, "[weave] together the psychological themes and spatial tropes of the Gothic" (Kavka 224). Once again, Corman and Matheson took Poe's original tale (an unnamed narrator is incarcerated in an Inquisitorial torture chamber and faces death by the pit and the pendulum) as the basis – this time making it the climax to which the rest of the film amounts – and expanded it considerably by adding established Gothic ingredients, such as the gloomy Gothic family mansion with its labyrinthine subterranean passageways, hauntings, the sins of the fathers and the return of the dead/repressed, or doubles. Some of Poe's favorite elements, for example, mental derangement, premature burial, or unspeakable violence against women, were also added. As a result, the Gothic character of the source material was once again amplified.

As becomes a Gothic horror film, a strong sense of mystery is evoked from the first. Not only is it obvious that Barnard's visit inconveniences the Medinas, but their secretive, apprehensive, and suspicious (guilt-ridden?) behavior also strongly suggests that they are hiding something from Barnard. When Barnard learns that his sister was not buried according to Christian rite, but "interred below" in the castle's crypt, following a "family custom," which, judging from his reaction, appears to be rather out of the ordinary, this also adds to the increasingly uneasy atmosphere. Interestingly, in contrast to *House of Usher*, the visitor is taken down into the subterranean vaults quite early in the film. The numerous heavy wrought iron doors and gates on the way deeper and deeper into the dark underground adumbrate that an unspeakable secret must be hidden below, and Barnard thus already comes very close to the center of evil early on. A first indicator that there is obviously something at work (and quite literally so) deep down in the castle's underground is the extremely loud noise of what sounds like heavy machinery that Barnard and Catherine perceive. Although this does not seem to disconcert her, she does protest when Barnard suddenly rushes towards the door from whence the noise seems to emanate. Clearly, she not only knows more than she admits, but

she also tries to keep Barnard from discovering what is behind that mysterious door; which immediately arouses suspicion.

Corman's incessantly moving camera and his often-used technique of fast crosscutting also help to increase suspense. For example, by crosscutting between Barnard approaching the door and several shots showing the door while the camera is zooming in on it, Corman imitates Barnard's POV. That way, the audience is put in his position as he is getting uncomfortably close to the door, which might open at any moment. A first moment of shock is created when, all of a sudden, the noise stops and the door is indeed abruptly opened by Don Medina, who is obviously angry about the disturbance and puzzled about the unexpected visit – the scene immediately recalls the very similar first encounter between the two male protagonists in *House of Usher*. In a close-up, Corman shows the two men face to face. In doing so, he not only establishes them as opponents; but he also visually juxtaposes two characters that, like in the first Poe film and following a Gothic tradition, are portrayed as complete opposites in the course of the film: once more, the younger of the two is rational, calm, though impatient, and quite sure of himself, representing the new generation and change (here in the form of bringing enlightenment through his investigation); while the older man is superstitious, highly sensitive, and emotional, his aristocratic background and demeanor suggesting a strong link to the past.¹⁸⁴

A master of suspense, Corman continues to keep the audience in the dark while at the same time stirring up curiosity. Thus, the only mysterious information Barnard can gather at this time is that behind this ominous door, which Medina makes haste to close and secure behind him, lies “an apparatus ... that must be kept in constant repair.” Like his sister, Medina acts rather suspiciously. In fact, he makes no secret of his hiding something, which builds up tension. In order to appease Barnard, who is quite angry about the lack of information concerning his sister's death, Medina finally agrees to take him to his sister's place of interment. On their way through the increasingly dark and narrow passageways, which create a strong feeling of claustrophobia, passing through further heavy wrought iron gates, Medina informs Barnard that Elizabeth died from “an illness of some duration” and that Dr. Leon, a physician “of repute” (meaning well-trusted by the family), had diagnosed “something in her blood” – again, the information is quite vague. Eventually, a Corman-typical fast pan to a sign on a wall reading “Elizabeth Medina 1517-1546” both indicates her

¹⁸⁴ Gothic texts frequently juxtapose the younger generation, which faces towards the future (and thus the world of the reader), and the older generation, which faces backwards (cf. Mighall 11). The Gothic hero, who represents the younger generation (and the reader) is trapped in the Gothic past inhabited by the villain (cf. Mighall 9).

resting place and reveals that she died a young woman hardly thirty years of age. As both the Medinas and Barnard are struck by grief, Medina invites his bother-in-law to stay the night. Barnard, however, obviously highly suspicious as much of the circumstances surrounding his sister's death as of his host, not only accepts the invitation, but also makes clear that he will stay as long as it takes to uncover "exactly what has happened here" – thus laying the groundwork for Corman's film, which, as Kavka has noted, "is set up as an investigation into the crypt" from the beginning (224).

In contrast to Roderick Usher, Medina altogether appears quite friendly and even fragile at first. The viewer is thus inclined to believe Medina (if cautiously, considering Price's usual Gothic roles) when the awareness that Barnard does not trust him regarding his sister's death seems to genuinely pain him. In order to overcome this barrier between them, Medina takes his brother-in-law to Elizabeth's flamboyantly furnished old room, where "the atmosphere is heavy," as Medina apologetically notes with a sad smile before he opens the blinds to let some light in. Strikingly, there is much more daylight entering the upper rooms of the Medina castle than there was in the altogether quite gloomy House of Usher. The discrepancy in light between the upper and lower levels of the castle, which seems to reflect the varying degrees (or literally different levels) of good and evil, is thus much greater in this film. To convince Barnard of his love for Elizabeth, Medina explains that her room, which has been kept exactly the way she left it (a sign of Medina's nostalgia for a happy past), was furnished with "dedicated love" and that every piece of furniture or décor was made by European craftsmen especially for her. Les Baxter's romantic score nicely underlines Medina's emotionality.

Suddenly, Medina's elucidation is interrupted in a classic horror film fashion, first by a creaking sound and then – with a nod to Poe's penchant for phantasmagoric illusion – by a silhouetted figure eerily passing behind a curtain. For the first time, the film thus introduces the characteristic Gothic element of the (seemingly) supernatural, creating an atmosphere of ambiguity as to whether the occurrence is real or imaginary and therefore producing a moment of hesitation – what Todorov called the fantastic (cf. chapter 1). To increase suspense, the romantic tune now changes into an uncanny one and the camera cuts back to Medina's terrified face. It soon turns out, however, that the ghostly figure is only Maria (Lynne Bernay), the maid, who was cleaning up; that is, the fantastic gives way to the uncanny. Corman has thus been playing mind games with the viewer, who (like Medina) was probably expecting Elizabeth's haunting return. Despite Medina's desperate attempts to convince Barnard that he truly worshipped his sister, Barnard (and with him the viewer)

remains skeptical, inducing Medina to call him “an unyielding man.” Even the portrait of Elizabeth (which is kept behind a red silk curtain), in which Medina tried to capture her “substance of loveliness,” leaves Barnard unmoved. Overcome by grief – nicely conveyed through Price’s melodramatic performance – he thus asks Barnard to leave. Proving his cinematic skill, Corman then cuts to a shot of the portrait again, which slowly dissolves into a shot of a screen-filling open chimney fire while the melancholic tune changes into a tense one; the effect is intriguing: the portrait seems to go up in flames, Elizabeth is therefore immediately associated with destruction, and a sense of foreboding is evoked.

The next scene introduces Dr. Charles Leon (Antony Carbone), family physician and at first appearance close friend of Don Medina. His unexpected visit seems to take the Medinas, who are having supper with their guest, by surprise (incidentally, the dinner scene, including the constellation of characters as well as the red-dominated décor, is strongly reminiscent of the quite similar dinner scene in *House of Usher*). Barnard seizes the opportunity and asks Leon quite bluntly what caused his sister’s death. It is obvious that he still does not trust the Medinas. Immediately, the situation grows tense, suggesting that there is something wrong. It becomes clear that Medina has been hiding certain facts from Barnard, and although he claims that he only wanted to spare him, Barnard does not believe his brother-in-law. After some toing and froing, the doctor finally reveals that “literally she died of fright;” in fact, he blames the “odious atmosphere” of the castle for Elizabeth’s death. In other words, true to Corman’s conception of the Gothic, the house is once again established as the monster. Barnard is furious, and seeing no alternative and to allay suspicion, Medina eventually decides – against his sister’s and the doctor’s recommendations – to take him down into the dark vaults, past the mysterious door, to the place where Elizabeth died: the torture chamber.

Putting the panoramic effect of Panavision on display, an establishing shot from the gallery (in fact the top of a staircase) down into the huge chamber allows a full view of its collection of cobwebbed torture devices including a rack and an iron maiden.¹⁸⁵ Medina explains that this torture chamber had been established by his father, Sebastian Medina; one of the “most infamous” figures of the Spanish Inquisition, as Barnard notes. Equipped with a torch, Medina then leads the group down a narrow staircase into the center of the chamber, their larger-than-life-sized shadows creating uncanny shadowplays on the walls – a nice and popularly used visual effect, which increases the haunting atmosphere of this site of horror. It

¹⁸⁵ Interestingly, in contrast to Poe’s story, which mostly takes place in the dark and thus allows the protagonist (and the reader) only a vague idea of the obscure torture chamber, Corman’s film shows it all, thus catering to the popular taste of sensational cinema.

is soon revealed, however, that there is more to the castle's mysterious underground than just this one horrible torture chamber; in fact, Medina is keeping a "particular device" in an adjoining chamber (the camera here shows a door at one end of the room) – the audience can guess from the film's title what this device might be. The fact that Medina does not want to talk about it and also asks Barnard not to go there once again builds up tension. By means of a clever strategy, which probably serves to divert audience attention for a while, the viewer is kept in suspense: oddly enough, Barnard drops the subject and instead insists to hear his sister's story "in detail."

Despite Leon's objection, Medina decides to oblige, expressing his painful awareness that he is "the spawn" of his father's "depraved blood" and ashamed of his father's cruel deeds in the past, some of which he now describes. What this moment clearly hints at is that Sebastian Medina's vicious spirit has always already been a part of his son, infesting his mind and exerting its haunting and eventually fatal influence on him from the beyond. This link between father and son had also already been suggested earlier in the film, when Medina showed Barnard a portrait of his father, which bore an uncannily close resemblance to Medina. By adding the classic Gothic theme of the sins of the fathers haunting the present generation to Poe's original tale and by making one of Poe's anonymous Inquisitors a thus afflicted protagonist in the film, Corman and Matheson obviously gave the plot a much more complex form as well as a psychological twist. Barnard, however, is not interested in Medina's personal demons, but only in his sister's fate, and Medina thus complies and explains that she was "too sensitive, too aware" to withstand the strain of the "malignant atmosphere" of the castle, which eventually destroyed her; in other words, there seems to be a general consent that the monstrous house with its "infernal air" and its "miasma of barbarity" played a central role in Elizabeth's untimely death. To Barnard, who remembers his sister as "a strong and willful woman" who would not have been influenced by such things as atmospheres, this is of course sheer nonsense (Corman is actually dropping a hint; however, at this point, the viewer will most likely not realize it). The film thus once again underlines the insurmountability of the gap between the superstitious views of Medina and the rational thinking of Barnard.

In one of Corman's much-praised, stylized flashbacks – announced first by the camera zooming in on Medina's face, followed by a rectangular iris closing in on him, and opened by a wipe – Corman visualizes Medina's voice-over memories of the good old times when Elizabeth was still immune to the house's corruptive energies. Using blue filters and a blurred frame (gel was applied to the lens to create the effect), he shows their happy everyday

routines before “the darkness began to fall” – including Medina painting her, resulting in the portrait in her room, and Elizabeth playing the harpsichord for him, for which she received a particular ring as a gift (which later becomes important). All of a sudden, Elizabeth began to transform, not only physically (like Madeline Usher, she would not eat), but also mentally. When one night, Medina found her in the torture chamber, he then knew that “the castle and its awful history had obsessed her,” the chamber with its instruments of torture – his “birthright” and his “curse” – now tormenting her, “infecting her with a kind of haunted fascination.” In other words, the monstrosity of the house is once again foregrounded. Medina describes how she was drawn towards these instruments “as if the aura of pain and suffering, which surrounded them, was luring her to sickness and to death.” Eventually, he made plans to leave the castle with her, but on the night of their departure, he and the doctor heard her scream and found her in the iron maiden. Before she died, she whispered to him: “Sebastian.”

This spine-tinglingly ending flashback sequence, which actually also foreshadows Medina’s eventual following in his father’s footsteps, is followed by another, technically identical and thus visually equally elaborate mindscreen only a short while later. In an attempt to convince Barnard, who still suspects Medina due to an “air of definite guilt” allegedly surrounding him, of her brother’s innocence and genuine goodness, Catherine tells him in a voice-over about an event from Medina’s boyhood to help him understand her brother: while playing in the lower corridor one day, young Nicholas (Larry Turner) went into the torture chamber to satisfy his curiosity although his father had strictly forbidden him to do so. Suddenly, his father – who is also played by Price to make the inescapable connection between father and son abundantly clear – together with his wife (Mary Menzies) and his brother Bartolome (Charles Victor) entered the chamber and Nicholas had to hide. Although he did not comprehend the situation at first, Nicholas yet knew that something was terribly wrong. Suddenly, his father turned on his uncle and brutally murdered him (here, Corman and Crosby replace the blue filter by a blood-red one and increasingly distort the images), calling him an “adulterer.” He then turned on his wife, accused her of debauchery with his brother, and promised her hell. At this climactic point, the visualization of the flashback ends, and the viewer is thus spared (or deprived of) what would most likely have been an extremely gory spectacle: Sebastian Medina tortured his wife to death in front of young Nicholas’s eyes. Catherine also reveals that, ever since then, her brother has been unable to “live as other men” because he continues to be haunted by the past; moreover, Elizabeth’s death nearly drove him insane. This is the first time that the film actually explicitly voices Medina’s increasing mental derangement. At the same time, not to mention the oedipal overtones of this scene, it

is implied that this childhood trauma in a way emasculated Medina. Incidentally, this encounter between Barnard and Catherine not only provides the viewer with information about Medina's past, but it also suggests the possibility of a romantic relationship between the two, thus adding another level of tension to the film; however, despite an obvious mutual attraction and a more affectionate conversation later in the film, it never comes to that.

To segue to the next scene, Corman interjects several shots of wild sea surf as well as a shot of the sublime castle seen from below against a turbulent sky (again a matte painting). As in *House of Usher*, these frequently used transitional inserts not only seem to function as a reminder of the film's overall setting, but also underline the role of the house as monster. Moreover, calling to mind a familiar proverb – “constant dripping wears the stone” – which refers to the slow, but incessantly destructive effects of water on stone, the images of the wild sea surf (perhaps representing the past) may well be read as a symbol for Medina's slowly deteriorating psyche (following Freud, Corman also used the sea as a symbol for the unconscious). In fact, what follows now points to just that. Conforming to the traditional Gothic conventions of the past dominating the present and the return of the dead or repressed to haunt the living, Corman suggests the haunting return of Elizabeth (to Medina's mind) by means of a number of clever strategies. For example, following the transitional shots, the camera cuts to a series of tracking shots (invoking a similar scene from Alfred Hitchcock's superb 1940 Gothic film *Rebecca*), which move from Elizabeth's resting place, through the torture chamber, through the great hall, and past the chapel, as if her ghost was haunting these places. The sequence is underscored by the sound of a harpsichord, which, as the viewer knows, used to be Elizabeth's instrument. It is then revealed, however, that no one can explain who could have been playing the instrument (Barnard, Catherine, and Leon had been upstairs and Medina has apparently never played the harpsichord in his life); Medina, however, is frozen in terror since he is convinced that it must have been Elizabeth (although he did not see her). The fact that Barnard finds her (aforementioned) ring on the keys of the harpsichord seems to corroborate this idea, and Medina (in a truly campy fashion) faints. Once again, the film suggests the possibility of a supernatural occurrence, but simultaneously also leaves room for doubt, thus producing the effect of the Todorovian fantastic.

In a crisis meeting, it is revealed how far advanced Medina's mental delusion actually seems to be. In contrast to Leon, Medina apparently believes that Elizabeth was interred prematurely; a secret the two have kept. According to Leon, he has also said to have experienced incidents of Elizabeth's haunting. Medina's dread, Leon claims, is due to the circumstances under which Medina's mother had died; that is to say, she was in fact not

tortured to death, as Catherine had believed and told Barnard earlier, but tortured and then entombed alive. Eventually, the doctor concludes that because they all heard the harpsichord (and it was thus obviously no hallucination), someone must know about the secret and is now using it against Medina – knowing the film’s ending, a rather hypocritical remark. In accordance with a visual hint Corman had dropped a little earlier, when the camera had shown Maximilian sneaking out a door, Leon suggests that the servant might be behind everything. Interestingly, Catherine seems to have her own suspicion, but she does not utter it – which of course again increases suspense. Once more, the camera cuts to the wild sea surf crashing against the foot of the rock on which the castle is mounted, as if to emphasize Medina’s disturbed mind.

A Gothic film to the core, the uncanny events continue. Introduced by a Dutch-tilted camera slowly moving in on the great hall from a side entrance – thus apparently imitating another incident of haunting – which immediately evokes a sense of impending threat, Maria’s piercing scream is suddenly heard from upstairs; she claims that Elizabeth told her to leave her room. Upset, Medina immediately locks the door to his wife’s chamber, saying that “no one will ever enter that room again” (a phrase that will play a crucial role later in the film). Sometime later, loud noise is heard from Elizabeth’s room and on entering it, Barnard and Leon find it completely ravaged; however, there is no sign of an intruder. The film thus once again creates an atmosphere of ambiguity as to whether the incident was of a natural or supernatural nature. When Barnard, as investigative as ever, stays behind to reexamine his sister’s room and discovers a secret passageway behind a dresser that leads directly to Medina’s room, however, his (and the audience’s) suspicions seem to have been realized, and he accuses Medina of having faked all inexplicable occurrences. Price again excels in his melodramatic performance of Medina, who is horrified, especially when he begins to believe that Barnard might be right, that he did everything unconsciously; which clearly suggests his mounting insanity. Eventually, it is decided that Elizabeth shall be exhumed to clear up doubt. While in the process of opening the tomb, Medina is haunted by the return of the repressed memory of his prematurely interred mother, which Corman again visualizes in an eerie flashback (the shrill score of which immediately invokes Hermann’s acoustically violent theme from Hitchcock’s *Psycho*). Upon opening the casket, Medina’s worst fears appear to be realized: a visually excessive, Grand-Guignol-flavored close-up of a woman’s decomposed, skeletal face, distorted in agony, her mouth wide open as if frozen in a scream, and her hands claw-like suggest that Elizabeth was obviously entombed alive after all. Joseph Maddrey has

pointed out that this moment is “comparable in terms of visual shock value to the climactic scene in *Psycho*, where Mrs. Bates stares at us accusingly from empty eye sockets” (45).

Corman’s increasingly turbulent transitional interjections; Medina’s attempted suicide as a consequence of his presumed crime and his fear of Elizabeth’s vengeance; and the heavy thunderstorm in which the castle is now caught all signify the inexorable deterioration of Medina’s psyche (as in *House of Usher*, the thunderstorm simultaneously also indicates the sharpening of the situation). A particularly important scene in this respect is the one in which Medina suddenly hears what appears to be Elizabeth’s voice calling his name and, in a touch of horror and curiosity, follows its luring sound through the mysteriously opening secret door in his room (Elizabeth’s doing?) into the dark passageway behind it. Considering Corman’s penchant for psychoanalysis, the ramified network of passageways that run through the castle’s interior may again well be read as representing the depths of Medina’s psyche. Consequently, his descent deeper and deeper into this claustrophobic network within the monstrous house signifies his getting lost in the workings of his monstrous mind; worse still, since the door has mysteriously fallen shut behind him, he is trapped, both literally and metaphorically in his own mental delusion, and there is no return. Underscored by portentous music, this is also emphasized by the sudden extinction of his candle, which leaves him in the dark in both senses of the word (or “umnachtet,” to use a fitting German expression); by a spiderweb, in which Medina gets caught (invoking the fatal trap/ping signified by the huge spiderweb in Browning’s *Dracula*, cf. chapter 2.4.2.); and especially by Price’s skillful performance of Medina’s increasingly mad demeanor. With Medina’s exploratory walk, Corman incorporated in his film what he regarded as a “classic Poe sequence” to create and sustain tension: walking down a long, dark hallway, complete with cobwebs, spiders, and rats, while there is a heavy thunderstorm, the protagonist “must find, or find out, something” at its end. “What he is going for is both incredibly enticing and incredibly horrible. So he must – and he must not – go” (Corman 79-80).

What Medina eventually finds is indeed “incredibly horrible.” Having followed Elizabeth’s voice, he finally reaches her crypt. In another Grand-Guignol-flavored moment, Corman shows a close-up of Elizabeth’s casket as the lid opens slowly with a creaking sound (another scene that seems to have been inspired by *House of Usher*). First, a bloody hand emerges from the blood-streaked casket, followed by what appears to be Elizabeth’s corpse (Barbara Steele). For a long time, however, the apparently undead, female figure is only silhouetted in the dark and thus remains eerily obscure (and thus sublime in the Burkean sense). Consequently, in contrast to Medina, who seems to recognize the corpse with horror,

the viewer can only guess who it must be, which results in a highly uncanny atmosphere and the creation of a strong sense of suspense. Fleeing from Elizabeth (whose identity is eventually revealed), frequently held up by locked doors or gates, which symbolize his mental entrapment, Medina descends deeper and deeper into the castle's – that is, his psyche's – depth. In this regard, it is interesting to consider Kafka's division of the house into "three successive areas of depth, each marked by an increasingly coarse, heavy gate and each representing a deeper space of (psychological) burial" (225). The entire time, Elizabeth is close on Medina's heels; in other words, the return of the dead and the return of the repressed, which had been locked in his unconscious, continue to haunt him both literally (physically) and metaphorically (psychologically). When after a desperate hunt Elizabeth, who seems to have gone mad (Corman's tilted close-up of her maniacally grinning face as well as Steele's convincing performance suggest this), once again calls her husband's name, Medina, mortally terrified, stumbles and falls down a flight of stairs into the torture chamber (Corman nicely visualizes this in a POV shot). But his initial crying suddenly turns into disconcerting laughter when he looks up at Elizabeth standing above him in the flesh (her physical position indicating her superiority), and it is clear that her return has triggered his irreversible mental collapse. Hence Kafka's remark that Medina's "fall down a spiral staircase coincides with his descent into madness" (225).

As soon as Leon appears on the scene, locks the door behind him, and reproaches Elizabeth for not having waited, it is clear that she is no ghost at all, but that the two have been plotting against Medina. Elizabeth's malicious joy at her husband's helplessness, resulting from his complete mental breakdown she had long been waiting for, and the following passionate kiss between her and Leon furthermore reveal that the two have been having an affair for quite some time. Once again, then, Corman and Matheson add a love plot, which not only enhances the story's overall complexity (and probably its audience appeal), but also gives it a clever twist: all the uncanny occurrences in the castle were not of a supernatural nature, but simply part of an ingenious hoax. In a Radcliffian manner, the supernatural is thus explained away, and the fantastic according to Todorov resolves into the uncanny. It thus also follows that Leon had only been playing – and convincingly so – the concerned doctor/friend the whole time; the seemingly honorable motives behind his actions suddenly turn out to be nothing but part of an evil plan. Immediately, Medina is in the clear because it becomes apparent that he has been the poor victim of an intrigue. For now, then, the atmosphere of ambiguity Corman had masterly built up with regard to Medina's true character (villain or victim) seems to be resolved.

As becomes a good Corman movie and a versatile actor like Price, however, it is not long before the tables are turned and Medina gets the better of the two. When Elizabeth gloatingly approaches Medina and mocks the fact that everyone close to him (his mother, his uncle, his wife, and his closest friend) has been guilty of adultery, this, perhaps in combination with the aura of the torture chamber, suddenly triggers something in him. Regaining consciousness and getting up with a malicious grin that suggests an air of superiority (also reflected in his tallness), Medina, obviously completely insane now, addresses Elizabeth as Isabella and Leon as Bartolome. As history is about to repeat itself, it is immediately clear that a fatal Gothic doubling has taken place: not only has Medina turned his wife and his best friend into the doubles of his mother and his uncle, respectively, but worse still, he has assumed the barbarous personality of his father, Sebastian Medina. Reenacting his childhood trauma, Nicholas alias Sebastian tortures his adulterous wife Elizabeth/Isabella by locking her in the iron maiden; at the same time, considering the aforementioned oedipal overtones of the flashback with which Corman had visualized Medina's childhood trauma earlier, Nicholas also commits an oedipal crime against his mother. Again, Corman spares his audience (or deprives it of) the gory spectacle; only Elizabeth's agonizing scream is heard. In fear of his life, Leon tries to escape the horror by seeking refuge in the mysterious adjoining chamber – however, not knowing that right behind the door lies the title's pit, he falls to his death (the pit's great depth is implied both by the camera filming Leon from below as he falls and by his long scream, which lasts for about 4 seconds). Driven into insanity, Medina has become the villain after all.

Leon's death turns out to be quite unfortunate for Barnard, who has been looking for Medina in the meantime: in his eagerness to punish his wife and her lover for their adultery and unaware that Leon has fallen into the pit, Medina mistakes Barnard for Leon, or rather Bartolome. Knocked unconscious, Barnard does not hear the words with which Medina introduces the film's climactic scene: "And now for you, Bartolome, my beloved brother, while you are still alive, my ultimate device of torture." What follows is a masterstroke of Corman and his crew's cinematic skill; or in his own words, "a technically complex and visually stunning payoff" (Corman 82). Following a close-up shot showing Barnard strapped onto a table, a blurred, then increasingly focusing POV shot imitates his regaining of consciousness. Medina, dressed in a black Inquisitor's robe and holding a torch, is standing above his victim and, still addressing him as Bartolome, asks him whether he is ready. Then, once again taking advantage of the panoramic effect of Panavision, the camera cuts to an awe-inspiring establishing shot of the sublime torture chamber, revealing its incredible vastness.

Also, for the first time, the film actually shows the title's dark pit, fitted with sharp rocks, and the giant pendulum, mounted on an enormous pillar in its center, which looms alarmingly above Barnard's strapped-down body.¹⁸⁶ Production designer Daniel Haller outdid himself with the creation of this lavishly decorated, immense set, which went "all the way up to the trusses and ceilings of the soundstage to create an aura of depth and menace" (Corman 83). The black-and-white murals of (sometimes red-eyed) Inquisitor figures painted on the walls are particularly noteworthy: obviously inspired by a description in Poe's tale and calling to mind German Expressionist sets with their distorted angles, these murals, shown in POV shots imitating Barnard's point of view, served not only to "give the sequence color, vitality, and a dynamic tension" (*ibid.*), but were also used to emphasize Medina's maniac show and to evoke a sense of impending threat and claustrophobia.¹⁸⁷

Finally, after Medina's introductory speech (the rest of the scene is silent for the most part), the torture begins. To keep the audience in suspense, Corman keeps crosscutting between the torture scene and shots showing Catherine going to Barnard's rescue; on the one hand, it is thus suggested that help is on the way, on the other hand, Catherine might just be too late (a thunderstorm emphasizes the precariousness of the situation). From the moment Medina sets the pendulum in motion, Corman frequently visualizes its deadly force in well-edited montages (by Anthony Carras), underscored by the heavy sound of the device's mechanical system. A number of (extreme) close-ups of the swinging and slowly descending razor-sharp blade put the viewer in Barnard's nightmarish position, bringing him unbearably close to the pendulum and thus increasing the horror of the moment. Establishing shots showing the huge pendulum from a distance as it swings frighteningly above Barnard, its shadow on a wall echoing its movement, do just the opposite as they allow the viewer to assume a voyeuristic position in the spectacle – in fact, the same voyeuristic position that Poe's unseen Inquisitors occupied in the original tale, thus making the viewer an accomplice to Medina's torture. And shots showing only the enormous shadowplay of the pendulum's elaborate mechanism further emphasize its fatal power. From time to time, these shots are interrupted by close-ups of Barnard's terrified face, which underline the horror of the scene. Medina, looking quite complacent, repeatedly accelerates the pendulum's speed. As Corman has explained, "the contraption ... didn't work as quickly as I liked. So I skip-framed it with an optical printer later, taking every other frame out optically to make the blade appear to

¹⁸⁶ For long shots of the pendulum, Corman used a wooden blade, while for close-ups, he used one made of sharp metal (*cf.* 83).

¹⁸⁷ Poe's description reads as follows: "The figures of fiends in aspects of menace, with skeleton forms, and other more really fearful images, overspread and disfigured the walls" (Poe 141).

move twice as fast” (83). Eventually, the pendulum touches Barnard’s belly, which was equipped with a pad and a skin-like device to give the cuttings a more realistic look (cf. 83). To increase the tension, the camera repeatedly zooms in to an extreme close-up of Barnard’s sweaty face and then his eyes, which are following the blade with horror; the camera’s movement thus seems to parallel that of the pendulum drawing nearer and nearer. Barnard’s exhaustion and the impending loss of his senses are visualized by means of a number of distorted shots showing Medina working the mechanism, the torture chamber, and Barnard on the table, which were filmed through colored filters while the sound of the pendulum’s mechanism was muted.

At the last minute, Barnard is saved by Catherine and Maximilian. In a short, but sharp struggle, Maximilian manages to throw Medina into the pit. The bloody blade is lifted from Barnard’s belly, and he is untied from the torture device. As the three are about to leave the torture chamber, they take a last look at the foggy pit, and the camera shows not only Medina, but also Leon (about whose death the three did not know) lying at its bottom. Catherine, Barnard, and Maximilian then leave the torture chamber; the camera, however, stays behind, cuts to the pit, and zooms in to one last eerie close-up of the defeated villain’s bloody face, who has ultimately fallen into the abyss both literally (physically) and metaphorically (psychologically). However, as becomes a cunning filmmaker, Corman does not end the movie here, but has one last, highly spine-tingling shock in petto: before the story’s three “good” characters turn their backs on the torture chambers and thus on all evil once and for all, Catherine turns towards the camera (and thus the audience) and, almost warningly, repeats the same words that Medina uttered sometime earlier in the film to do Elizabeth’s “ghost” a favor: “no one will ever enter this room again.” At this, the camera suddenly pans at a dizzying pace and reveals in a close-up the terrified, gagged face of Elizabeth, who is still trapped inside the iron maiden – a fact most viewers had probably forgotten until now due to Corman and Matheson’s ingenious diversionary tactic in the previous scenes.

Elizabeth’s cruel deeds against her husband and, following a Gothic law, especially her sexual transgression are retaliated at last: since no one will ever enter the torture chamber again, as Catherine had determined, and no one actually knows about Elizabeth still being alive as a result of her own mischievous scheming, no one will ever look for her again, and her fate is thus sealed – a fact that becomes unmistakably clear with Corman’s final shot of a rectangular iris closing in on her doomed face. In other words, Medina has beat her at her own game by burying her alive, this time for real. However, with such a cruel ending, *Pit and the Pendulum* “[denies] complete catharsis”; moreover, by avoiding “that familiar emblem of

redemption and hope,” it refrains from restoring order in conventional terms (Worland 296-97). Consequently, the viewer is left shuddering when Corman ends his film with a spine-tingling quote by Poe that reads as follows: “the agony of my soul found vent in one loud, long, and final scream of despair.”

6. Recent Gothic Cinema and Tim Burton's Fabulous Gothic Fantasies

He has a Gothic sensibility Anyone who has seen any of his films would say that was the case.

(Ian McDiarmid)

Burton transforms the everyday into an adventure in the same way a child does within the confines of his own mind.

(Ken Hanke, "Tim Burton: Part One")

When Tim Burton's work as a filmmaker gained momentum in the late 1980s, horror cinema had just undergone a phase of extraordinary developments, which also considerably affected the Gothic film. Since the great success of Roger Corman's Poe series in the early 1960s (see chapter 5), various new kinds of (Gothic) horrors had conquered the screen. Thanks to the waning power of the censoring Production Code, the 1960s and 1970s, the decades of the sexual revolution, which brought about sexual liberation and the separation of sex from biological reproduction due to birth control, not only popularized the exploitation film (as well as the "blaxploitation" film, a variant thereof that was targeted at an urban black audience), which built on lurid presentations of sex, nudity, and sensational violence, for example; but they also gave rise to birth-, baby-, and child-related horror.¹⁸⁸ This form of horror was partly fueled by the initially serious side effects of the contraceptive pill and a product called Thalidomide, an anti-morning sickness medication, which caused severe birth defects (cf. Skal, *The Monster Show*, 287ff.). Numerous films, such as *The Village of the Damned* (1960), *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), or *The Omen* (1976), to name but a few Gothic examples, which frequently featured satanic tampering and in which reproduction often "crossed over into the realm of Gothic science-fiction" (Skal, *The Monster Show*, 294), thus dealt with monstrous births, horribly deformed babies, or evil children, reflecting parental anxieties. The demonic and the occult in general came to play a central role not only in many horror pictures of the time, but also on television. Besides rather serious (often Gothic) horror series, such as *The Twilight Zone* (1959-64), *The Outer Limits* (1963-5), or *Dark Shadows* (1966-71), the two parodic Gothic sitcoms *The Munsters* and *The Addams Family* (both 1964-6), which "subconsciously reinforced the growing equation between the world of gothic horror and the middle-class American family itself" (Worland 92), enjoyed great popularity.

¹⁸⁸ It is interesting to note that in 1968 the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) established a new ratings system, which gave the film industry greater freedom as to what could be shown on screen.

Probably, the most significant forms of horror that emerged between the 1960s and the 1980s were the so-called splatter- or “gore film” (an expression coined by exploitation/splatter filmmaker Herschell Gordon Lewis in the mid-1960s), which has its roots in the Grand Guignol, and the slasher film; both forms ran parallel and often overlapped.¹⁸⁹ Following early, influential examples such as the British Hammer films, *Psycho* (1960) (for both see chapter 5), *Peeping Tom* (1960), the particularly gory Italian Giallo film *Black Sunday* (1960), or Corman’s Poe series, which had also already reflected the increasing trend for graphic violence on screen, the growing interest in films that foregrounded scenes of gore and explicit violence gave rise to movies such as *Blood Feast* (1963) or *Black Christmas* (1974). In 1968, the exploitation film (as well as zombie cinema) was revolutionized when George Romero’s extremely gory *Night of the Living Dead* was released; the first film in his so-called Dead series, which gave rise to a new type of zombie.¹⁹⁰ The film’s presentation of gruesome bloodshed and apocalyptic feel not only reflected the horrors of the Vietnam War and the political upheavals it caused (cf. Skal, *The Monster Show*, 309), but also racial issues stirring America in the times of the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁹¹ The 1970s and early 1980s, in particular, were the decades in which nightmarish gore horror (profiting from increasing improvements in make-up- and special effects) saw its heyday. Echoing the dystopian worldview of the time, these films frequently ended on a pessimistic note, “with moral boundaries erased, or even with a clear victory for the monster, family and society crumbling,” and thus denied catharsis (Worland 95). Besides *Last House on the Left* (1972), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), or *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), which all revolved around monstrous families, other formative hits included *Carrie* (1976), *Halloween* (1978; arguably the first slasher film), *Friday the 13th* (1980), or *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), which focused on terrorized teenagers.¹⁹²

Films such as *The Amityville Horror* (1979) and *The Shining* (1980), which both featured a monstrous Gothic house and revolved around the Gothic theme of the sins of the

¹⁸⁹ In contrast to the splatter film, which focuses on the gory physical destruction, mutilation, decomposition, or mutation of bodies, the slasher film usually involves a mysterious psychopathic killer who stalks and brutally kills a number of (teenage) victims.

¹⁹⁰ To date, Romero’s socio-critical Dead series comprises the following zombie-apocalypse films: *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), *Dawn of the Dead* (1978), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Land of the Dead* (2005), *Diary of the Dead* (2007), and *Survival of the Dead* (2010). In contrast to previous films, in which zombies were the product of voodoo rites (see chapter II.4.), the series presented its zombies as flesh-eating ghouls. According to Dendle, “Romero liberated the zombie from the shackles of a master, and invested his zombies not with a function (a job or task such as zombies were standardly given by voodoo priests), but rather a drive” (6). Most critics agree that the zombie movie owes yet another popular innovation to Romero, namely the idea that zombies can only be destroyed by a shot to the head or any other severe injury that will deactivate the brain core.

¹⁹¹ Romero himself described his zombie films as “splatter,” hence the term.

¹⁹² Worland has noted that *Halloween* “popularized one of the most controversial visual elements of post-1968 horror, a subjective camera ... that puts the audience into the optical point of view of the killer” (101).

past haunting the present, as well as a considerable number of werewolf and vampire movies that reclaimed the screen in the 1980s – a time of growing awareness of blood-borne diseases such as AIDS, resulting in a new approach to the vampire, for example – including *The Howling* (1980), *An American Werewolf in London* (1981), *The Lost Boys* (1987), or *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), brought the Gothic back into greater focus. This renewed interest in the Gothic since the late 1970s comes as no surprise given the fact that the end of the decade saw the emergence of the goth subculture.¹⁹³ The scene's style, including characteristic make-up and dark and flamboyant clothes, soon began to influence popular culture, especially film. Its influence was particularly well visible in *Alien* (1979), for example, a highly atmospheric science-fiction horror movie with a distinctly gothic look thanks to the production design by Swiss surrealist artist H. R. Giger. In fact, the relationship between goth subculture and cinema has been a reciprocal one from the beginning, with both continuously drawing on one another. Interestingly, the growing number of gothic-style Gothic films, including *The Crow* (1994) or the *Underworld* series (2003, 2006, 2009), show the increasing trend of a fusion of the two particularly since the 1990s.

Tim Burton, “un artiste gothique” (Baecque 138), whose own appearance often suggests a penchant for the goth style, entered the Gothic stage in the early 1980s and by now has become a household name; an “identifiable brand” even, as Salisbury has noted, “the term ‘Burtonesque’ being ascribed to any filmmaker whose work is dark, edgy or quirky, or a combination thereof” (xviii). The name Burton “alone conjures images of gothic landscapes” (Fraga vii), and it has come to stand for “highly stylized films” (vii) with “a recognizable gothic design” (Andac).¹⁹⁴ A great admirer of classic Gothic horror films and (often Gothic) fairy tales, Tim Burton has stayed with the mode: running like a thread through his *oeuvre*, the Gothic (to a greater or lesser extent) is invoked in almost all of his movies. Usually, Burton chooses his subject matters freely and has total control over his projects and materials. As

¹⁹³ As Powell and Smith have noted, the emergence of goth subculture “led to an upsurge of nostalgic interest in historical Gothic literature, art, and architecture, as well as a market for new Gothic films,” and by the 1990s, “Goth had produced its own authors and ‘auteurs’ such as Poppy Z. Brite in the novel and short story and Tim Burton in film” (4). For matters of simplification, I will use the term Gothic (with a capital “G”) to refer to the mode and the terms goth or gothic (with a small “g”) to refer to anything associated with the subculture. Passages quoted from other material, of course, do not necessarily follow this usage.

¹⁹⁴ Burton is not only a successful filmmaker, but his Gothic vision has also found expression in numerous drawings or his book *The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy & Other Stories* (1997), among other things. Not long ago, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City honored the art and films of Tim Burton in a special monographic exhibition that traced “the current of his visual imagination from early childhood drawings through his mature work in film” (MoMA homepage). The exhibition took place from 22 November 2009 to 26 April 2010. For more information, see the MoMA's homepage (<http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/313>) and the exhibition website (<http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2009/timburton/>). It is also interesting to note that Burton's lasting impact on popular culture has not only manifested itself in film, but also in Burton paraphernalia (such as Nightmare-Before-Christmas-inspired items) and even in fashion (for example, Edward-Scissorhands-inspired neo-Gothic outfits or Alice-in-Wonderland-inspired fashion).

Andac has noted, “[very] few people in Hollywood have been allowed to have as much freedom as Burton,” who in his view is “a contradiction – a filmmaker who has a distinct and uncompromising style and yet remains grounded in the Hollywood studio system”; “the perennial outsider on the inside.” In contrast to the majority of films by his fellow directors Tourneur and Corman (see chapters 4 and 5), for example, the films in Burton’s *oeuvre* are invariably quite personal, his “modus operandi [being] based entirely on his innermost feelings,” as Salisbury has put it (xviii).¹⁹⁵ In order to be able to understand the films of Tim Burton, it is therefore imperative to take a look at his biography.¹⁹⁶ Burton grew up in the 1960s and 1970s in the Los Angeles suburb of Burbank, an outpost of Hollywood; an environment from which he felt very much alienated. In order to escape his surroundings, he sought refuge either in front of the television watching horror movies or in the movie theater, “connecting psychologically” to the images on the silver screen, “while remaining removed from the world around him” (Burton and Salisbury 1, xv). From early on, Burton’s “passion was monster movies” (xv), which in his view, due to their detachedness from reality, have a somewhat “cathartic” effect (qtd. in Andac). Even today, they are still his “form of myth, of fairy tale” (qtd. in Breskin).

Because Burton often felt like an outsider during his youth, he could always identify with the monsters and outcasts in the stories. Burton has explained his fascination as follows: “I’ve always loved monsters and monster movies. I was never terrified of them, I just loved them from as early as I can remember.” To him, there “was something about that identification”; he “felt most monsters were basically misperceived, they usually had much more heartfelt souls than the human characters around them” (Burton and Salisbury 2-3). It thus comes as no surprise that most of his own films revolve around the “misperceived,” yet amicable melancholy Other; or in David Breskin’s terms, the “outsider-in-town theme,” which has in fact become a Burton “trademark” (cf. Page 14). As Hanke has noted, the “typical Burton hero ... is somehow outside the realm of society. He is mentally and often physically different than those who make up the ‘normal’ world.” In many of Burton’s films, which generally revolve around the theme of duality, this is emphasized by the use of different colors to dissociate the protagonist from his environment. Significantly, Burton’s male (sometimes female) protagonist is usually an antihero rather than a hero; flawed,

¹⁹⁵ While Tourneur was what Wood has called a “born collaborator,” who always needed someone to collaborate with and whose personal vision thus tended to fade into the background (*Personal Views*, 256), Corman was generally oriented towards mainstream demands. Consequently, the personal touch in the films of both directors is less obvious than in Burton’s work.

¹⁹⁶ In the highly insightful book *Burton on Burton*, the filmmaker talks to editor Mark Salisbury about his work. Although not an autobiography in the strict sense, the book does provide a great deal of biographical and personal information.

gloomy, occasionally lacking courage and being a hypochondriac, “a perturber and a disturber” (Brombert 2, 66), he is unable to fit in and has trouble coping with what is happening around him. By Burton’s own account, he has always been particularly intrigued by Frankenstein’s monster, especially as impersonated by Boris Karloff in James Whale’s 1931 film adaptation of Mary Shelley’s Gothic novel (see chapter 2.4.2.); a film that, as one of Burton’s all-time favorites, has left a clear mark on his *oeuvre*.

Whale’s *Frankenstein* along with the other films Burton watched in his youth, especially the Gothic horror films, not only deeply affected him back then, but they have also had a lasting effect on both him and his work, shaping his own Gothic vision. This manifests itself, for example, in the fact that many of Burton’s films are reinventions or reimaginings of these movies and/or (adaptations of) the popular Gothic texts many of them were based on (he was particularly influenced by the American Gothic tradition). Moreover, Burton has frequently paid homage to his favorite Gothic horror films by appropriating prominent elements from these motion pictures in his own films, such as certain set designs – which is what some critics would call a postmodern pastiche.¹⁹⁷ It has always been important to Burton “not to make a direct linkage” to these films, however; that is, instead of simply copying or emulating certain elements, he has always made sure to convey his own “impression” of these elements, “filtered through some sort of remembrance,” as well as the emotions they evoked in him. In Burton’s view, “just borrowing something” means to not have “any feeling for it” (32-5). Besides Whale’s *Frankenstein*, another particularly great influence were Corman’s Poe adaptations (see chapter 5), Poe being one of the major American Gothic writers whom he has always admired (cf. Burton and Salisbury 4, 16). The dark heroes in these AIP films were usually played by Burton’s idol Vincent Price, somebody he “could identify with” (Burton and Salisbury 5) and who played a central role as “muse and creative father” (Andac) throughout Burton’s professional life until Price’s death in 1993. In fact, Price starred in two of Burton’s own films: he not only had his final on-screen appearance as the protagonist’s inventor/father in Burton’s *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) – reflecting the close relationship between Burton and Price – but he had also already featured as the narrator in *Vincent* (1982); together with *Frankenweenie* (1984), this was one of Burton’s first Gothic films which he made while still working for Disney.

Even in *Vincent*, a “claymation” animated short film based on a Dr.-Seuss-style poem written by Burton, the dark (if often comic) tone and the distinct Gothic quality that characterize the greater part of Burton’s films, are already clearly discernible. Shot in black

¹⁹⁷ In *Sleepy Hollow*, Burton has even paid homage to one of the earliest technological apparatuses to create terrifying images for the purpose of entertainment: the magic lantern (cf. chapter I.2.2.).

and white, *Vincent* revolves around seven-year-old outsider Vincent Malloy, who, instead of acting like other boys his age and playing with his friends, is only interested in being “just like Vincent Price.” Obsessed with the dark tales of Edgar Allan Poe (especially “Ligeia” and the poem “The Raven”), Vincent escapes the reality of his suburban environment by retreating to an imaginary world; heavy on expressionist set design, it is strongly reminiscent of the décor in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, which also reflected the psychological landscape of the protagonist (see chapter 2.3.). In this imaginary world, he then lives through some of the gruesome experiences of Corman’s gloomy “AIPoe” protagonists (including live burial and the haunting return of the dead) – *Vincent*’s parallels to Burton’s youth are more than obvious.¹⁹⁸ The reanimated dog that played a role in *Vincent* also featured in *Frankenweenie*, a “reworking” of Whale’s *Frankenstein* and its sequel *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), which was also shot in black and white (Burton and Salisbury 31). Again set in a suburban area, *Frankenweenie* tells the story of Victor Frankenstein, a ten-year-old boy-turned-mad-scientist (another outsider in town), who brings his dead dog Sparky back to life in the attic of his parents’ house; in a scene that bears striking resemblance to the famous reanimation scene in Whale’s film. As in the original Gothic story, Sparky – complete with the now-iconic metal bolts on his neck made popular by Jack Pierce’s makeup for Karloff’s monster in Whale’s adaptations – is eventually pursued by an angry mob. In the end, however, everybody makes peace, and Sparky even finds a bride for himself: a poodle with hair like that of Elsa Lanchester, the original *Bride of Frankenstein*. According to Burton, the setting for the film’s climax (including a burning windmill) was not only inspired by that in Whale’s version, but also by Burton’s suburban environment: “there were these miniature golf courses with windmills which were just like the one in *Frankenstein*. ... There were poodles that always reminded you of the bride of Frankenstein with the big hair” (Burton and Salisbury 36). In Burton’s view, the world of the movies he watched often coincided with his own world (at least in terms of images), “the parallel between suburban life and a horror movie” being “really closer than you might think” (Burton and Salisbury 99).

While *Frankenweenie* was no success (due to a PG rating, the film was not released as originally planned), *Beetlejuice* (1988), Burton’s next Gothic project, was quite a hit. A black,

¹⁹⁸ Burton has always had a penchant for stop-motion animation films, especially those by Ray Harryhausen, because of their “artistry” (Burton and Salisbury 5); he has also expressed a liking for their Frankensteinian quality as “something inanimate [coming] to life” (252). For *Vincent*, he found stop-motion particularly fitting because “he felt there was a gravity to those three-dimensional figures that was more real for that story” (16). Precisely because of Burton’s conscious decision to continue availing himself of “old-fashioned” animation techniques in an age of increasing digitization, Alison McMahan has described him as a “pataphysical” director; that is, a filmmaker who is “aware of this digitization process and the role that animation plays in it” and thus makes “different kinds of films, films that reflect this awareness” (15-6).

slapstick-style horror comedy, written by Michael McDowell, the film follows the story of a young couple who, after having been killed in a car accident, begin to haunt their old house. When a yuppie family moves into their home, they go to the underworld and ask Betelgeuse (pronounced Beetlejuice), a “bio-exorcist,” for help to scare the intruders away. Betelgeuse, however, obnoxious and childish, turns out to be no great help as he soon begins to act in his own interest: he plans to marry the yuppie family’s daughter to secure his return to the land of the living. Like *Vincent*, *Beetlejuice* featured German-Expressionist-style design for the often bizarre sets, which were furthermore inspired by surrealism. The greater financial freedom Burton enjoyed in this film gave him greater creative freedom as well, allowing for spectacular special effects, including stop-motion and blue screen, among others. Only one year later, in 1989, Burton’s “most financially successful,” but “arguably least personal” film was released, as Andac has put it; yet, the film clearly bears the distinct visual touch of its director: *Batman* – another text about duality, that is, the dual personality of the title character – based on the Gothic comic book by DC Comics, which together with its sequel, *Batman Returns* (1992), secured Burton’s status as a recognized film director. Given artistic freedom in the film’s set design, Burton created “a grand, rotten urban texture and a brooding tone” (Breskin); both films in fact had an intensely dark and ominous Gothic atmosphere, emphasized by the use of heavy colors and gloomy lighting. Despite its many flaws, *Batman*’s enormous success enabled Burton to realize his next and much more heartfelt project.¹⁹⁹

Inbetween the two *Batman* movies, Burton made *Edward Scissorhands* (for a detailed analysis, see chapter 6.1.); along with *Vincent* and *Frankenweenie* one of his most personal films, which was released in 1990 and exemplifies what Arno Meteling has called the “new Gothic film of the 1990s” (11; my translation); that is, a return to the Gothic uncanny after a phase of particularly gore-focused films.²⁰⁰ Burton’s Gothic fairy tale, whose bright colors in fact “disguise a film with a dark core” (Booker 32), was based on a drawing he had made as a teenager and a screenplay he had commissioned Caroline Thompson to write. Again revolving around the outsider-in-town- or “fish-out-of-water” (Andac) theme and an updated reimagination of *Frankenstein*, it tells the story of Edward – played by Johnny Depp, who has become a Burton regular – who was created by his inventor/father (played by Price) who gave him shears for hands.²⁰¹ Clumsily, Edward – “a character who wants to touch but can’t,” who

¹⁹⁹ Warner Brothers entrusted the *Batman* project to the hands of Tim Burton after he had directed the commercially successful *Pee Wee’s Big Adventure* (1985) for them.

²⁰⁰ *Edward Scissorhands* actually marked Burton’s debut as producer.

²⁰¹ Many critics have ventured the guess that Edward is, in a way, an on-screen version of Burton himself. Incidentally, it is interesting to note Edward’s resemblance to Struwwelpeter, a character from a German

is “both creative and destructive” (Burton and Salisbury 87) – destroys everything he touches, and to his great horror, he accidentally also kills his creator. One day, Edward is visited in his dilapidated Gothic hilltop mansion (which calls to mind the settings of Corman’s haunted-castle films for AIP) by an Avon representative who administers to the lonesome creature and takes him home with her. But despite all efforts, Edward has trouble finding true acceptance in his new pastel-colored, suburban environment that forms such a stark contrast to his Gothic habitat. Falling victim to numerous misunderstandings, he is eventually cast out as a monster by the neighborhood in which he lives and has no choice but to return to the Gothic, yet safe world of his mansion. Presenting a genuinely innocent character who is unable to communicate and as a result is misperceived and thus “othered” by those around him (a typical teenager malady), the film can be read as a reaction against society’s tendency to categorize people. As in *Frankenweenie*, Burton’s displeasure about suburbia and suburban society, a place that in his view has a “vagueness” and “blankness” about it and “where there’s no sense of history, no sense of culture, no sense of passion for anything” (Burton and Salisbury 90), is writ large in this film, which features both sociological aspects and fantastical elements; a combination very much to Burton’s liking (cf. Burton and Salisbury 85-7).

Following *Ed Wood* (1994), which was not a Gothic film per se, but revolved around the life of former Gothic horror icon Bela Lugosi (see chapter 2.4.2.), and *Mars Attacks!* (1996), a bizarre parody of 1950s science-fiction films, Burton made *Sleepy Hollow*, which was released in 1999 and in fact marked Burton’s debut in making “something that was more of a horror film” (Burton and Salisbury 164; for a detailed analysis, see chapter 6.2.). A loose, fundamentally Gothicized reworking of the popular American Gothic short story “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1819-20) by Washington Irving (see chapter 2.4.1.), based on the screenplay by Andrew Kevin Walker, the film is one of Burton’s most Gothic pictures, especially in terms of its visual imagery.²⁰² The setting, for example, is much more eerie than

children’s book by Heinrich Hoffmann (1845), or Charles Ogle, who played Frankenstein’s monster in Edison’s 1910 adaptation.

²⁰² Irving’s original tale – set in the late eighteenth century (Gothic Revival America) in the rural, dreamy little valley of Sleepy Hollow that is inhabited by superstitious farmers – tells the story of the protagonist Ichabod Crane, a highly superstitious schoolmaster, who unsuccessfully woos the rich patriarch’s daughter Katrina Van Tassel. Unfortunately, Katrina is also courted by Ichabod’s rival Brom Bones, a Herculean rogue, who decides to play practical jokes on Ichabod to push him out of favor with Katrina. At the end of the story, Ichabod leaves the Van Tassel’s farm after an evening of “merry making” (284) and ghost stories and, on his way home through the dark night, is seemingly pursued by the Headless Horseman, the protagonist of the town’s favorite horror story. Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” repeatedly emphasizes the superstitious beliefs of both the townspeople and Ichabod Crane. And, on the last pages, it obviously suggests to the reader that the nightly pursuit by the headless trooper, who throws his head at Ichabod, was merely a practical joke played on him by Brom Bones. This idea is reinforced when the townspeople find a shattered pumpkin instead of a severed head the next day.

the setting in Irving's story: with its dark and mysterious atmosphere, the particularly sinister wilderness of the forest with its dead trees, and its ominous foggy dampness – effectively emphasized by Emmanuel Lubezki's gloomy cinematography and Danny Elfman's haunting score – *Sleepy Hollow* is no longer a peaceful and dreamy village, but rather has the air of a doomed place. In order “to fulfil Burton's vision best,” almost the entire film (that is, interiors and most exteriors, including the forest) was shot on sound stages in studios in England because of their “totally controlled environment” (Burton and Salisbury 170); only the town of Sleepy Hollow was built and shot on location in the English valley of Lime Tree. Artificial fog, the almost monochromatic cinematography, and the technique of forced perspective then facilitated the visual linking of the various sets (cf. McMahan 74); although Burton deliberately maintained a stage look (enhanced by the fog) that was inspired by the old horror movies. As production designer Rick Heinrichs put it, “[we went] for a kind of ‘natural expressionism’” (qtd. in Burton and Salisbury 170). Burton also wanted to evoke the artifice-heavy style and “otherworldly quality” of the Hammer films, which resulted from being shot primarily on soundstages (Burton and Salisbury 170). Adding to the Gothic quality of the film – besides Lubezki's dream-like and highly stylized cinematography – were a number of what McMahan has called “invisible special effects,” as opposed to the “visible effects” (such as the beheadings), including painted backdrops extended by sky replacement scenes, real skies replaced with digital versions, enhanced digital matte paintings, and digital painting used to add to live plates (74). These “invisible special effects” heightened the film's dark atmosphere.

Besides a generally much darker, more sinister and macabre tone, Burton's reimagination of Irving's original work also involved several other interesting changes by means of which Burton and Walker amplified the Gothic quality of the film.²⁰³ For example, in contrast to the protagonist in Irving's tale, a highly superstitious schoolmaster with an “appetite for the marvelous,” whose uncanny experiences turn out to be nothing but the result of his overworked imagination and a practical joke, Burton and Walker's conflicted antihero Ichabod Crane, a metropolitan detective and “hyperbolically rationalist” man of science (Orr), is confronted with real supernatural events. That is to say, the film actually features a real Headless Horseman (another Gothic Other), and a murderous one at that, who is called from his grave by Lady Van Tassel (no longer a good housewife, but a murderous psychopath) to

²⁰³ For an interesting comparison of original text and film adaptation, see also David L. G. Arnold's essay “Fearful Pleasures, or ‘I am Twice the Man’.”

mercilessly claim heads in *Sleepy Hollow*.²⁰⁴ While Irving's tale thus offers the reader the possibility of interpreting the end of the story as a venomous joke played on a superstitious teacher, Burton and Walker do quite the opposite in the film: what is first thought to be mere folk legend and smiled at by the protagonist (and probably also by the audience), suddenly becomes a terrifying reality. As Martin Kevorkian has aptly commented, by tellingly omitting the word "Legend" from its title, "the film *Sleepy Hollow* reinscribes a supernatural dimension that the tale had teasingly proposed but ultimately rejected." By adding this "supernatural dimension," Burton and Walker actually make the film version a much more thrilling Gothic text than Irving's original could ever be. In this regard, it is also interesting to note that the film abandons the major action of Irving's story after about half an hour; the rest of the film, including a complex conspiracy as well as a romance between Crane and Katrina, is thus the result of Burton and Walker's imagination, giving the filmmaker the opportunity to pull out all the stops in enhancing the Gothic character of his work even more. Interestingly, according to Burton, his reimagination of *Sleepy Hollow* was less based on Irving's legend, but rather drew on his memory of the often very Gothic Grimm's fairy tales, the horror films of his youth, and particularly the 1949 Disney cartoon adaptation he and his generation grew up with. He could also not refrain from once more paying tribute to Whale's *Frankenstein* and thus set the climax of his film in an old windmill which was "somewhat inspired" by that in Whale's film (audio commentary).

After a break of several years, in which Burton directed *Planet of the Apes* (2001); *Big Fish* (2003), another deeply personal film; and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005) – films that although hardly Gothic nevertheless share, at least to some extent, the typically dark quality of Burton's other pictures – Burton returned to the Gothic with abandon with *Corpse Bride* (2005). Ever since *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993), for which he had functioned as co-writer and producer, Burton had been eager to do another feature-length stop-motion animation. Based on a 19th-century European folk tale, the film is about a young man (looking like a grown-up version of Burton's Vincent) who travels back to his home town to marry his fiancée. When a dead woman who has come into possession of his wedding ring returns from the grave and claims that she is his lawfully wedded wife, however, he suddenly finds himself trapped between the Land of the Dead and the Land of the Living; a situation from which he is eventually freed when the corpse bride realizes that he is probably better off with his still living fiancée after all. Using gloomy and rather lifeless colors for the land of the living and bright colors for the realm of the dead, Burton addresses the theme of

²⁰⁴ For the Horseman's headless appearance, blue screen was used, and for the horse-riding sequences, Christopher Walken mounted an artificial horse from an old movie (cf. making-of commentary).

“the living world being much more ‘dead’ than the dead world” (Burton and Salisbury 252); a theme that is found throughout his *oeuvre*. In *Corpse Bride* he thus not only once again gave expression to his dislike of a repressed “puritanical suburban existence”; but the film was also a reaction to another societal taboo which Burton repudiates because it “happens to everybody” and should thus be treated as part of life: death (Burton and Salisbury 253) – a topic he explored extensively in his next project, *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (2007), a particularly macabre and gory, visually sophisticated Gothic musical.

What distinguishes Burton’s films, especially his Gothic movies, is their “poetic lyricism” (Andac) and exceptional, signature visual style that not only reflects Burton’s own aesthetic sensibility, but also caters to that of an audience that enjoys being enchanted by his magical and often dreamy films. It seems that Burton, who has made no secret of preferring the visual over the verbal, has always been less interested in plot and narrative structure, but rather in conveying emotions and striking a chord with his viewers by creating a particular feel, sometimes constructing “a narrative to support the visuals, not the other way around” (Fraga xv). As he put it: “You don’t have to have this great linear story to get a feeling out of a film” (Burton and Salisbury 173). His preference for the Gothic, which has per se always been a particularly visual mode, thus seems only fitting. There is also the fact that Burton has repeatedly expressed his strong penchant for (Gothic) fairy tales, which also rely on expressive (often extremely violent) visuals and have their own narrative logic; though he has claimed that he does not like “fairy tales *specifically*,” but rather “the *idea* of them,” especially their symbolism and their openness to interpretation (Burton and Salisbury 3). It is thus hardly surprising that his films tend to have a fairy-tale quality in that they are also highly symbolic and carry a message that is transported first and foremost through their visual imagery.

One visual characteristic that is commonly regarded as particularly Burtonesque (to some extent perhaps reflecting the director’s critical view of the world) is the tendentially dark and gloomy tone of his films, which often have a sinister quality to them. This is not only true for his Gothic films, but also for his non-Gothic motion pictures; adaptations, no matter how cheerful the original source material might be, are also usually darkened.²⁰⁵ Partly as a tribute to early silent horror films, Burton has often shot in black and white; or he has used (almost) monochrome cinematography – “the updated equivalent” of black-and-white images (Shaviro 1) – especially blue filters, to “enhance the fantasy aspect and make the ‘unreal believable’” (Burton and Salisbury 176), thereby evoking his signature atmosphere,

²⁰⁵ In Burton’s films, the dark tone is in fact usually introduced right at the beginning with his customized version of the studio logo.

further emphasized by heavy lighting. He has also repeatedly availed himself of Expressionist or at least Expressionism-inspired décor (showing a special penchant for geometrically absurd angles and distorted perspectives); in Burton's view, Expressionist design is reminiscent of "the inside of somebody's head, like an internal state externalized" (Burton and Salisbury 175). Thus, to quote Breskin, his set design is often "heavy on German Expressionist sensibility" (323).²⁰⁶

Burton's settings, in particular, are always highly atmospheric, often radiating a dreamy, fairy-tale feel. In this respect, composer Danny Elfman, for whom music and soundscape have the function of "narrative storytelling" (McMahan 210), has played a crucial role in Burton's career. Since he wrote the score and thus set the tone for all of Burton's films since *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure* (except for *Ed Wood* and *Sweeney Todd*), his name is forever linked to the signature atmosphere of Burton's *oeuvre*. For the trademark ambience of his films, Burton has also frequently relied on the talents of concept designer Rick Heinrichs, who has also been one of Burton's regular collaborators. Besides Frankensteinian laboratories or dark and haunted forests, two other distinctly Gothic settings regularly featured in his films are the attic and the Gothic mansion, which he likes because of their "sense of isolation" (Burton and Salisbury 98). He has also frequently introduced Gothic elements in contemporary settings, such as suburbia. Interestingly, however, Burton often inverts conventional notions of certain settings: a Gothic mansion is suddenly no longer an eerie place, but becomes a peaceful and safe refuge (*Beetlejuice*, *Edward Scissorhands*); or instead of evoking horrors of death and decay, the netherworld is suddenly transformed into a fun(ny) place (*Beetlejuice*, *Corpse Bride*); while a suburban neighborhood, usually perceived as friendly, suddenly becomes a locus of terror and persecution (*Frankenweenie*, *Edward Scissorhands*).

There are certain ways by means of which Burton's films – in which the Gothic often serves to name and shame the "horrors" of contemporary society, hence to some extent functioning as a vehicle for an "antiestablishment message" (McMahan 7) – have renegotiated the Gothic for a contemporary audience.²⁰⁷ Besides a usually fast pace (for example, the first three and a half minutes of *Sleepy Hollow* alone consist of over fifty cuts), Burton has updated classic source materials such as *Frankenstein* or "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," for instance, by relocating them to a contemporary setting (*Vincent*, *Frankenweenie*, *Edward Scissorhands*) or by amplifying their horror quality, for example, by means of elaborate

²⁰⁶ Burton obviously has a particular penchant for (distorted) black-and-white tiled floors, which are featured in many of his films and were probably also inspired by German Expressionism.

²⁰⁷ By using the Gothic for social critique, Burton has actually been following a Gothic convention.

special effects (*Sleepy Hollow*). At the same time, considering Kim Newman's comment on "the prevailing Hollywood notion that nobody could possibly take horror seriously" and that realistic horror does not seem to scare audiences much these days, Burton has combined horror with tongue-in-cheek humor, irony, and black comedy, thus taking away the claim to real or realistic horror from the start; or as he put it with regard to *Sleepy Hollow*: "we wanted to keep the spirit of a horror movie, but also to have fun with it" (Burton and Salisbury 178). For the same reason, he has made use of rather stylized horror elements, which at once also help to emphasize the fairy-tale quality that Burton usually seeks to convey in his films. In *Edward Scissorhands*, *Sleepy Hollow*, and *Sweeney Todd*, for example, Burton deliberately exaggerated the red color of the blood to create an artificial look.

Burton has made a name for himself as a visionary and passionate director (and producer) of films with a unique and instantly recognizable, most notably Gothic, visual style, whose "profound effect" is partly due to the way they communicate "on a symbolic level, speaking of things far deeper within our conscious and subconscious minds than most films would dare to delve" (Page 7). Because so many of Burton's films, which frequently draw on popular classic Gothic narratives and motion pictures, are clearly indebted to the Gothic tradition – with Burton providing his own distinctive interpretations rather than simply copying or recycling Gothic conventions – he fits perfectly into the historic and visual "descendance" of the Gothic (Baecque 137). It can thus be stated that Burton promotes and thereby secures the legacies of both the literary Gothic and Gothic cinema by using them as sources of inspiration and then rereading or reimagining them for a contemporary audience. In fact, it is safe to say that Burton is one of the present generation's most efficient agents in preserving and securing the Gothic legacy. Stanley Cavell once noted that "movies reproduce the world magically" and thereby, in a way, preserve it. Tim Burton, in and through his movies, reproduces the magic world of the Gothic and thus keeps it alive.

6.1. Reinventing *Frankenstein*: *Edward Scissorhands* (1990)

The story of an uncommonly gentle man.

(Tagline for *Edward Scissorhands*)

He is a way that you feel: What you say is not coming across, what you want is misperceived.
(Burton on Edward in “The Rolling Stone Interview”)

Edward Scissorhands is a bittersweet Gothic fairy tale, and this is obvious from the start. As the opening credits – shot in monochromatic blue tones that create a mystical atmosphere (the skilled work of cinematographer Stefan Czapsky) and accompanied by Danny Elfman’s enchanting score, which sets the emotional tone throughout the movie – inform the viewer that this is a Tim Burton film, the camera slowly zooms in on a heavy old wooden door which suddenly opens mysteriously and allows the camera (and the viewer) to enter into the world of the movie – a Burtonesque variation on the classic “once upon a time” fairy-tale beginning. Following the opening credits, which provide glimpses of the strange world of Edward Scissorhands, Burton opens his film with an establishing shot of a Gothic hilltop mansion on a snowy night, its one lit window suggesting that it is inhabited. The snow, a motif associated with Edward throughout the film, adds a peacefulness to the snow-globe-like image that already hints at the film’s inversion of conventional notions of horror. When the camera zooms out, it reveals an elderly woman in a cozy, warmly lit bedroom; a grandmother in fact, who is putting her granddaughter to bed. But the little girl (Gina Gallagher) in her oversized bed (calling to mind similar images from fairy tales such as Little Red Riding Hood) is not sleepy and asks her grandmother to tell her a bedtime story about the origins of the snow. Thus, the grandmother sits back in her rocking chair by the fireplace and begins her Frankensteinian tale about an old inventor who long ago lived in the hilltop mansion and created a man with scissorhands, but who died before he could finish his supernatural creation, leaving the man orphaned and all alone. While she narrates, the camera moves out of the window into the night, across a snowy suburban neighborhood, and up the hill to the Gothic mansion. When the granddaughter asks her grandmother if the man had a name, she replies: “Of course he had a name; his name was Edward.”

With this all too familiar scene of the grandmother telling her granddaughter a bedtime story, Burton sets the frame for his film, emphasizing its fairy-tale character. Interestingly, as soon as the grandmother reveals the title character’s name, the camera’s point of view changes from a view of the mansion into an over-the-shoulder shot sharing Edward’s (Johnny

Depp) point of view while looking down from a window of the mansion at the sleepy suburban world at the foot of the hill – a clear indication for the viewers that they are now (literally) side by side with the protagonist inside the story. The dreamy atmosphere is abruptly disturbed, however, when the music suddenly stops as the camera then cuts to a series of shots showing the suburban neighborhood and the everyday life of its inhabitants during the day. The scenes set in Burton's stylized suburbia were actually filmed on location in Florida because the suburban neighborhoods in California, where he grew up and which were built in the fifties, looked too "overgrown"; "Florida just happened to be a place where the neighborhoods were new and had that flavour to them" (Burton and Salisbury 93). In order to slightly remove the houses from reality while retaining a community feel and to underline Edward's "more romanticized view of the world," they were painted in different pastel colors and plants were added to the yards and backyards; the insides, however, were hardly altered, resulting in a fairly authentic atmosphere (cf. 93). As Burton has argued, a characteristic feature of fairy tales is "these very extreme images, very heightened, but with some foundation to them. It means something, but is fairly abstract" (94). With their tawdry colors – also in line with the Gothic's penchant for visual excess – the sunlit suburban houses thus not only helped create a fairy-tale quality, but they also formed a stark visual contrast to the dark look of Edward's Gothic castle, which was furthermore mostly filmed in monochromatic blue tones. In general, Burton's settings in the film bear features of both the late 1980s, when it was made, and the 1950s and 1960s so that "the historical setting of the action [becomes] entirely indeterminate" (Booker 31), which also helps to remove it from reality. As Richard Corliss has noted, "[the] whole movie, in fact, time-travels between [the time of its making] and the '50s, when every suburban house could be a quiet riot of coordinated pastels. But the film exists out of time – out of the present cramped time, certainly – in the any-year of a child's imagination."

Into this environment, Burton introduces Peg Boggs (Dianne Wiest), a not-too-successful saleswoman for Avon cosmetics.²⁰⁸ When out on business, Peg puts on a seemingly rehearsed show and her behavior becomes completely unnatural, as if she were putting on a mask; which is precisely what the products she sells help to do. The cosmetics thus nicely underline the shallow or "surface-oriented" character of the suburban environment (audio commentary). Peg's sales tour through her neighborhood allows Burton to delve deeper into the peculiarities of suburban life by introducing some of its (in his view) stereotypical female

²⁰⁸ Burton liked Dianne Wiest for being funny, but at the same time bringing "emotional weight" to the film. He has claimed that while many characters were modeled on real persons he knew, Wiest's character was fictional and represented the sort of person he had wished for when growing up in suburbia (cf. audio commentary).

specimen; housewives in gaudy clothes (always dressed according to the season) who seem rather bored and thus grab every chance of excitement. Joyce (Kathy Baker), for example, a man-eating woman who plays a prominent role in the film, is shown flirting with the plumber whom she obviously called under a pretext. A rather odd character is Esmeralda (O-Lan Jones), a religious fanatic living in a house richly decorated with candles and religious paraphernalia, who, in contrast to her neighbors, prefers spending her days playing an electronic organ and thus lives on the fringes of suburban society. When Peg, frustrated that she has not sold anything and about to give up for the day, eventually sits in her car, she suddenly discovers the Gothic hilltop mansion that is located at the end of the street in her side mirror, which Burton shows in a close-up – a visualization technique that emphasizes the gloomy mansion’s sublime and heterotopic character, juxtaposing it with the colorful suburban environment, that already points to the outsider status of its dweller.²⁰⁹ In the hope of making a sale after all, she decides to pay it a visit.

As Peg drives towards the hill, the mansion looming on top – shown in an establishing shot that might have come straight out of a Corman/“AIPoe” movie (cf. chapter 5) – looks rather sinister, and Elfman’s portentous music also suggests that she is about to put herself in danger. When Peg finally reaches the house and steps through a large Gothic stone archway, which is decorated with huge gargoyles and marks the entrance to the property, however, she suddenly and quite unexpectedly finds herself in a beautiful, immaculately kept garden with colorful flowerbeds and skillfully trimmed topiaries in the form of animals and a large hand – another recurring motif, “symbolic of [the] longing to be complete” (Page 81) – that not only immediately create a friendly atmosphere, but also imply a creative genius.²¹⁰ Peg’s astonishment while she looks around finds expression in Elfman’s now dreamy score, which changes back to a portentous one again, however, as soon as Peg approaches the mansion. Entering through the heavy, old, and somewhat oversized wooden door, which makes Peg appear small – in fact the same door that Burton used in the opening credits as the entrance into the world of his movie – she steps into a huge and colorless hall (which strongly contrasts with her lilac suit), only dimly lit by rays of light falling through two slit windows. The antique furniture, covered by cobwebbed sheets, and the weirdly shaped walls and labyrinthine staircases as well as the geometrically absurd hallways (reminiscent of German Expressionist set design; cf. chapter 2.3.) add an antiquated element to the already gloomy

²⁰⁹ For a detailed discussion of Michel Foucault’s concept of the “heterotopia” see chapter 5.

²¹⁰ In contrast to the suburban neighborhood, the scenes set at the mansion were not shot on location, but on the FOX studio lot; for the creation of the set, Burton was aided by set designer Bo Welch. Burton preferred a built set (as opposed to things created in post-production) because it felt more real (cf. audio commentary).

and desolate atmosphere. That there is something odd about the place is also emphasized by the strange, dusty heavy machinery that Peg discovers in the hall – most likely another visual allusion to one of Corman’s Poe adaptations, namely *Pit and the Pendulum* (see chapter 5.2.).

Peg’s first encounter with Edward is quite uncanny. Hearing a grinding sound (in fact Edward’s scissorhands), Peg eventually decides to go upstairs in order to find out if someone is home. That she does not notice the oversized shadow lurking ominously above her before it disappears again – a familiar horror film device conventionally used to create a sense of foreboding – points to her optimistic and somewhat naïve nature, which is further emphasized when she begins to recite her Avon-speech and remarks, quite out of turn: “I’m sorry to barge in like this, but you don’t have any reason to be afraid. Whew! This is some huge house, isn’t it? Thank goodness for those aerobics classes.” She then reaches the enormous attic – like the Gothic mansion a place that Burton associates with a sense of isolation (Burton and Salisbury 98) – which is only partly covered by the dilapidated roof.²¹¹ In an old fireplace, whose back wall is plastered with images and clippings of other “incomplete” humans, a suburban home, and an image of Mary and Jesus as a baby (to Edward probably just an image of the mother-child bond he never had), that is, images that clearly show what Edward longs for, Peg finds a pathetic wrought-iron bed filled with straw. Again hearing the grinding noise, she turns around and discovers someone crouching in the shadows. As she moves towards the man and – ironically enough – reassures him that he does not have to be afraid of her, the “local Avon representative,” who is “as harmless as cherry pie,” the man suddenly steps out of the shadow into the light and reveals his enormous scissorhands – designed by special effects artist Stan Winston, the scissorhands were supposed to be large because Burton wanted Depp “to be beautiful and dangerous” (Burton and Salisbury 99). Terrified and realizing that she is probably in great danger, Peg begins to retreat apologetically – but surprisingly, the man who will introduce himself as Edward a moment later begs her not to go. Only then does Peg see his sad face, and she understands that he is all alone and needs help. Funnily enough, a trained Avon beauty specialist, the first thing Peg does before she takes Edward home with her is treat his scarred face, which in Burton’s film is not a monstrous feature, but a sign of vulnerability. “Significantly,” as Andac has noted, “Peg’s failure to ‘cure’ Edward’s scars can be seen as a bittersweet foreshadowing of her inability to ‘cure’ Edward of his status as outsider by taking him into town.” The scene, which starts out rather eerie, but then takes a comic turn, not only plays with conventional horror notions of light/good and dark/evil, revealing the “monster” as a genuinely innocent creature, but it also nicely illustrates the

²¹¹A great fan of attics, Burton again used the set of an attic in *Sweeney Todd* which looks just like the one in this film.

film's main theme: appearances might be deceiving, that is, a person is sometimes "perceived to be the opposite of what he is" (Burton and Salisbury 92), and to judge a person by his or her outward appearance might do that person injustice.

With Edward's arrival in suburbia, it is at once obvious that he is out of place and does not fit in. Not only do his wild black hair and his black goth-style outfit – a combination of latex, leather, Naugahyde, and black tape, among other things (cf. audio commentary) – form a strong visual contrast to the lively colors of the new environment, but his presence also immediately causes a stir, especially among the female neighbors. Although Peg does her best to make him feel at home and integrate him into her family, it is clear from the beginning that he is expected to conform to suburban standards, which is precisely what Burton's film strongly criticizes (cf. Burton and Salisbury 87). Thus, one of the first things Peg does, after showing Edward pictures of her loved ones to give him a sense of family (something Edward does not know), is to provide him with clothes; like the cosmetics Peg sells a form of mask he has to put on in order to assimilate into his environment. This appears all the worse given that Edward, shortly before he changes into a white shirt (of all colors) and a pair of pants to alter his appearance, experiences a brief moment of self-recognition. Left alone in the room of Peg's daughter Kim, he sees himself in the mirror and recognizes himself; following Lacan's concept of the mirror stage, an event that seems to strengthen his sense of identity – which is then weakened again by his new look. Kim's mirror also has another function in this scene though. From the beginning, a strong connection between Edward and Kim – who are also linked by a musical theme, a variation of his theme – is established, prefiguring a romantic plot that invokes the classic Beauty-and-the-Beast theme. Not only is it love at first sight for Edward when he sees Kim's picture in the living room upon his arrival at the Boggs' house; but the clippings (predominantly showing eyes, which seem to signal that all eyes are on Edward) which she has cut out and with which she has plastered her mirror, calling to mind the clippings from Edward's sleeping place, as well as the snow globes in her room (snow being associated with Edward) suggest strong parallels between the two characters.

Again and again, Burton shows Edward, a typical antihero, in situations that are funny and pathetic at the same time; for example, when he tries to dress himself, but his scissorhands always get in the way, or when he touches Kim's waterbed, which he finds so fascinating, and accidentally punctures it, which he then tries to cover up. In part due to Johnny Depp's skillful acting (whose expressive eyes have always particularly fascinated Burton), these situations are entertaining, but, exposing both Edward's clumsiness and displacement in a world that is completely strange to him, also evoke compassion in the

viewers, resulting in their growing identification with the “monster.” The scene of Edward’s first family dinner at the Boggs’ house is another example of such a situation (the camera frequently taking Edward’s point of view facilitates the audience’s identification with him). Continuously parodying suburban life – as in the previous scene when Burton showed all husbands returning from work at the same time in a choreographed arrival and all wives rushing home from gossiping in front of the Boggs’ house to prepare dinner – Burton depicts a typical family dinner, which once again makes clear how out of place Edward is in suburbia as his scissorhands make it impossible for him to handle the cutlery and eat like everyone else. Although Peg and Bill Boggs (Alan Arkin) do their best to treat Edward like a “normal” human being, engaging him in small talk as civilized hosts would do and constantly reminding their son Kevin (Robert Oliveri) not to stare at their guest, it comes as no surprise when Kevin, who is fascinated by Edward’s scissorhands, asks his mother whether he could bring Edward to school for “show and tell,” thus stressing his status as a “freak.”

The next day, after most husbands have left for work (in a once again choreographed departure)²¹², Edward’s usefulness is discovered; and for a while it seems as if he might be able to come to terms with suburban life and society after all. Not only does he patiently act as a guinea pig for Peg’s Avon cosmetics, who repeatedly tries to cover up Edward’s scars (another attempt at making him appear “normal”), but he also shows great skill in trimming bushes when he creates a topiary representing the Boggs family in their backyard. When the neighbors spontaneously invite themselves to a barbecue at the Boggs’ house to finally meet the mysterious guest and Peg needs to quickly prepare food, his scissorhands furthermore turn out to be a great help in the kitchen, where he almost blends in with the other kitchen appliances. Suddenly, however, while watching an electronic can opener, Edward’s happy mood is dampened by a memory from his past returning to his consciousness, which Burton presents in a flashback – or mindscreen (cf. chapter 3) – that is introduced by the camera alternately zooming in on Edward’s face and the can turning in the can opener before a dissolve reveals a large can in an oversized can opener. Joyously watching his self-built – typically Burtonesque – cookie-making assembly line (which Peg had discovered earlier when she visited the Gothic mansion) while Edward’s pre-human, robot-like form is chopping vegetables, Edward’s inventor/father (Vincent Price) – in Burton’s film not the typically Gothic mad scientist, but a gentle creator – picks up a heart-shaped cookie and holds it to

²¹² Incidentally, the music in this scene is strongly reminiscent of the main theme of the series *The Simpsons*, which was also composed by Elfman only one year prior to the release of *Edward Scissorhands*. Like *Edward Scissorhands*, *The Simpsons* also parodies the suburban life of working-class Americans. Interestingly, the titular family lives in a suburban neighborhood (in fact in a pastel-colored house) that is quite similar to that of the Boggs.

Edward's tin chest; an emotional gesture that provides a first hint at how Edward came to evolve from this early stage in his creation as nothing but a kitchen appliance to the man with a heart now standing in Peg's kitchen.

Edward's talents also do not go unnoticed by the neighbors, who are initially very curious about and friendly with him when they first meet him at the barbecue. With the exception of Esmeralda, who regards Edward as a spawn of the devil and a "perversion of nature," everyone finds him rather exciting and soon begins to take advantage of him as a "helpful, handy household item" (Burton and Salisbury 90). Joyce, in particular, who not only finds Edward "exceptional," but is also sexually attracted to him, seems to have her own plans with him. Edward's relative ease of handling social intercourse is explained in another flashback (introduced by a voice-over by Price). Lying in bed on his second night at the Boggs' house, he remembers how back in the old days at the Gothic mansion his loving inventor/father patiently taught him etiquette and how to smile. Apparently envisioning a normal life for his "son" in the "real world," he obviously wanted Edward to learn what would be expected of him and thereby save him from "humiliation and discomfort"; in other words, he prepared him for a life in conformity with social conventions – again, Burton's critique is clear: without conforming, life in society will be a struggle. Interestingly, showing the individual steps of Edward's creation as the wind turns the pages of a sketchbook, the flashback also reveals what the completed Edward should have looked like: a normal young man with hands – "producers of sensation, the quintessential synecdoche of sensitivity" (Potter) – instead of scissors.

Since the inventor died before he could finish his creation, leaving Edward with shears for hands, however, it comes as no great surprise when his first encounter with Kim (Winona Ryder) – Burton's blond-cheerleader version of the beautiful and innocent Gothic heroine – turns out to be a disaster; another scene that evokes both laughter and pity. Returning from a camping trip late at night and undressing in her room unaware of Edward's presence, she screams in horror when she looks in her mirror and suddenly discovers him lying in her bed – the discovery of the monster in the mirror being a familiar horror film moment, which in Burton's film, however, is rather funny than eerie. Equally terrified and in panic, Edward punctures Kim's waterbed, producing a plethora of little fountains. The comic element is stressed further when Bill takes Edward down to the basement, where he will sleep from now on, and seizes the moment to have a glass of "lemonade" with him at his house bar, where he expresses his discomfort with "crazy" teenage girls and their physical transformation. The teenage world is probably strange to Edward; although he does represent the "ur-teenager who

feels alienated from his or her environment” (Markley 281). By the time they are joined by Kim and Peg, who formally introduces the two, Edward, not used to alcohol, is drunk and passes out, making it rather difficult for Kim to like him.

With the exception of Kim, who always makes him nervous, Edward seems to grow increasingly comfortable around people; who, in turn, act very friendly and accepting towards him. His “show and tell” performance at Kevin’s school turns out to be a great success, and the neighbors are very enthusiastic about his topiary skills. Only Kim, whom Edward is particularly anxious to please, much to the scorn of her boyfriend Jim (Anthony Michael Hall), remains skeptical of Edward. When in passing Edward gives a dog a haircut, the women in the neighborhood suddenly realize his potential as a hair stylist, and Edward has to create a new look for each and every one of them. All women catching the wave, Burton’s visualization of the hair-cutting session is a parody of suburban women *par excellence*, which is emphasized further by the absurdity of the new styles. For Joyce, who obviously has a sexual desire for Edward and a fetish for his scissorhands, the thrill of exposing herself to Edward’s blades even seems to equal a sexual encounter, as she moans with pleasure.

Already a neighborhood sensation, it comes as no surprise when Edward is also discovered by the media. Together with Peg, he is invited as a celebrity guest on a talk show where the audience gets to ask him questions – Burton’s parody of “bad daytime television” (audio commentary). For example, he is asked whether he would like to have corrective surgery or whether he would miss not being special anymore if he had hands instead of scissors, to which Peg replies that “no matter what, Edward will always be special.” Remarkably, throughout the film, people repeatedly tell Edward that they know a doctor who might be able to “help” him, which reflects society’s need to assimilate otherness, but in the end, contact is never established; in other words, their offers are insincere (cf. Page 81). When asked whether there is “some special lady” in his life, a question that obviously makes Edward nervous, the TV camera shows Edward in a close-up for dramatic effect. For the same purpose, Burton then cuts to Kim, who is watching the show at home with Jim and Kevin, and zooms in on her face, which suddenly appears equally nervous. Crosscutting between close-ups of Kim and Edward on TV, Burton creates a magic moment as it seems that the two are exchanging a long look straight into each other’s eyes. The moment is abruptly disturbed, however, when Edward accidentally cuts the power cable of his microphone and suffers an electric shock; at which Burton, tongue in cheek, has the show’s host (John Davidson) immediately take a commercial break. Kim is genuinely worried, and the fact that she has been ignoring the teasing comments of her boyfriend and her brother about Edward’s obvious

infatuation with her all along and now scolds them for laughing at Edward's accident shows that her skepticism towards Edward is already changing into affection.

One audience member's suggestion to Edward to open his own beauty salon has inspired Joyce to do just that, and she thus takes Edward to the mall to show him the premises of their potential joint venture, which she intends to call "Shear Heaven" as a pun on Edward's magic shears that will make every woman feel as if in heaven. What she is particularly eager to do, however, is to show Edward to the backroom in order to model some smocks for him, or so she says; in other words, she is planning on having sex with him. Placing Edward in a treatment chair and fittingly putting on "With These Hands" by Tom Jones – in Burton's view the quintessential sound of female suburbia (cf. audio commentary) – she begins to strip for him and eventually climbs on top of Edward in order to seduce him by using one of his blades to unbutton her top; filming Joyce from behind as she mounts Edward, Burton's visualization is deliberately far from erotic and rather ridiculous. When she leans forward to kiss him, however, the chair suddenly tilts backwards, ruining Joyce's plan as the two fall over. As Edward, who due to his naïvety apparently has no notion of what has just happened, runs off, the ominous sound that sets in and Joyce's anger and frustration about Edward's rejection already herald the film's turning point. Funnily enough, when Edward meets his family at a typically American diner shortly after and tells them innocently that Joyce showed him "to the back room where she took all of her clothes off," everyone is shocked, except Bill. Apparently notoriously immune to what is really going on around him, he evidently has not paid close attention to what Edward has been saying and only suggests that Edward visit a bank to take out a loan in order to start his venture – another example of the superficiality of suburban small talk which Burton criticizes.

Edward's visit to the bank once again makes it quite clear to him that he is an outsider. As the loan officer notes, without a credit, a record of past jobs, savings, personal investments, and a social security number, Edward "may as well not even exist" in the eyes of American society. When he suggests that Edward also buy a car and get "one of those handicapped placards" with which he can park anywhere, Burton's underlying sarcastic criticism of society's need to categorize everything is more than obvious. Besides emphasizing Edward's outsider status, however, the scene has another important function: Edward's need for money is voiced; a condition that will soon have disastrous consequences for him. Having noticed Edward's ability to open doors without leaving a trace (in an earlier scene, Edward opened the front door for Kim, who had forgotten her key), Kim's boyfriend Jim plans to break into his own parents' house with Edward's help to steal goods and then sell

them in order to get the money to buy a van for Kim and himself; more importantly, one with a mattress in the back, probably to allow him to make out with her. Kim, by now fond of Edward and unwilling to take advantage of him, is reluctant, but Jim – whom Burton presents as the typical “psychotic” high school “jock” throughout the film, as remembered from his own school days (Burton and Salisbury 95), and thus as the exact opposite of shy and gentle Edward – sticks to his guns, convinced that Edward will do anything for Kim if she asks him. Thus, in a nightly raid, he and his masked gang – with their black van painted with flames Burton’s variation on the Gothic banditti – make Edward, who does not know Jim’s house and thinks that he is only reclaiming what someone else allegedly stole from Jim, enter his father’s safe room. Unfortunately, things do not go as planned, however, and Edward, terrified and not comprehending what is happening while desperately trying, is thus locked in as the alarm goes off; the fast editing of the scene and the use of an unsteady hand-held camera, as Edward is trapped and the gang runs off, leaving him on his own, underscored by menacing music, amplify the tension considerably.

From the moment the police arrive, things take a turn for the worse, marking the film’s turning point as it begins to descend into darkness. The hitherto suburban idyll increasingly becomes a nightmarish place for Edward, as one misunderstanding is followed by the next. To begin with, Edward’s scissorhands are taken for weapons as he slowly walks towards the police cars – a scene remarkably visualized by Burton: the camera follows right behind Edward, thus taking his point of view and evoking empathy in the viewer, and in over-the-shoulder shots, the viewer is as much dazzled by the cars’ headlights as Edward is, resulting in a similar feeling of stress. Although the neighbors, attracted by the turmoil as usual, save him by explaining who he is as the situation is about to escalate and it looks like the police will shoot him any second, convinced that Edward is a “psycho” (an impression emphasized by Edward’s monstrous-looking shadows on the walls of the house behind him), the foundation for mistrust is laid.²¹³ At the police station, the misunderstandings continue as Bill and Peg, who earlier at the bank promised Edward that they would get money for him “somehow,” assume that Edward wanted to steal money for his joint venture with Joyce. Worried parents that they are (Burton again plays with stereotypes), they first blame themselves, then the TV programs, and finally they ask Edward if someone else suborned him – but in his good-heartedness and probably to spare Kim, Edward remains resolutely silent.

The scene of Edward’s release from prison provides yet another example of society’s need to categorize, which Burton names and shames throughout his film. Before Edward is

²¹³ Burton has referred to this, in his view typical, suburban sensationalism as the “pull-out-the-lawn-chairs kind of mob mentality” (Burton and Salisbury 99).

allowed to leave, a psychologist (Aaron Lustig) is asked for his professional opinion on Edward who notes that, due to the years of isolation in the Gothic mansion, Edward is unable to know right from wrong and furthermore has an underdeveloped sense of “what we call” reality – obviously a sarcastic comment on Burton’s part implying society’s arrogance of claiming to know what is “real” or “normal.” Remarkably, however, the doctor (dressed in a turtle-neck shirt obviously Burton’s stereotype of an intellectual) is unable to definitely categorize Edward, which shows when he explains that the topiaries and hair styles Edward created “indicate that he’s a highly imaginative ... character,” the pause indicating that he is obviously at a loss for a term to describe Edward. What is most odd about the psychiatrist’s evaluation, however, making Burton’s parodic take abundantly clear, is that when asked whether Edward will be “all right out there” he confirms this without hesitation. Interestingly, like the bank building before, the counter where Edward receives his discharge papers is shown in a low-angle shot, most likely to emphasize the intimidating superiority of the public sector, while bar-like shadows create a sense of confinement, which Edward increasingly experiences. Moreover, hiding the officer’s head behind that of Edward and showing only the officer’s arm stamping Edward’s papers somewhat mechanically, Burton seems to want to stress the anonymity of the public sector as well.

When Edward returns to suburbia, however, he is anything but “all right out there.” The neighbors are mistrustful and begin to shun Edward and the Boggs, canceling hair appointments and parties. Suddenly, the very same attributes that made Edward “mysterious” and “exceptional” now make him a monster. Joyce, in particular, still angry about her failed seduction, which she now claims to have been attempted rape, and Esmeralda, who suspected Edward to be a spawn of evil from the beginning, gladly join in the malicious gossip of the neighborhood. Unsurprisingly, the media’s interest – whose vulture-like appearance at sites of sensation and growing influence on people the film criticizes (cf. audio commentary) – is also immediately reawakened. For Kim, however, the situation is different as just like in the fairy tale of *Beauty and the Beast* she finally begins to see Edward for what he really is. When in a brief encounter, plagued by her bad conscience, she apologizes to Edward, it not only shows that she likes him, but it also turns out that Edward did know that he was breaking into Jim’s house after all. When she asks him why he nevertheless agreed to the break-in, he replies that he did it because she asked him to, thus indirectly confessing his feelings for her. Jim’s sudden appearance disrupts this intimate moment between Edward and Kim, and for the first time, Edward shows some form of aggression, obviously caused by jealousy. As in the case of Frankenstein’s misperceived monster, strong emotions of pain thus seem to trigger aggressive

behavior. What Edward does not know, however, is that ever since the break-in, when Kim finally discovered Jim's corrupt character, their relationship has been crumbling. Following him through the house to the bathroom, the camera finally shows Edward shredding the wallpapers around the mirror, in which he recognizes his angry face; a clear sign of both his self-awareness and consciousness. Despite this touch of destructiveness, the Boggs, like Edward's inventor/father before them, still believe in his ability to learn and thus teach him a lesson in ethics at the dinner table that night, which calls to mind the lesson in etiquette he once received at the mansion. When Kim and Kevin begin to defend Edward, expressing their approval of his naïve sense of right and wrong (he would do anything for his loved ones), which obviously differs from the common notion of right and wrong, Bill's inflexible reaction as he upholds traditional ethical views seems to imply a critique on Burton's part of society's frequent skepticism towards unconventional views.

Kim's growing fascination with and affection for Edward find expression in a visually poetic and magic scene in which the fairy-tale character of Burton's film reaches a climax. While everyone is decorating for Christmas – an “odd phenomenon” of a holiday that in Burton's film becomes another emblem for suburban phoniness, as symbolized by the fake snow blanket Bill staples to the roof (cf. audio commentary) – Edward does what he does best and uses his scissorhands to carve a huge ice sculpture in the form of an angel in the Boggs' backyard.²¹⁴ The ice flakes he whirls up while cutting away boisterously allow Kim, now dressed in a white dress that gives her an angel-like appearance as well, to dance in the snow overwhelmed with bliss; accompanied by Elfman's enchanting theme, which connects Kim and Edward, this is one of the film's most memorable romantic scenes. Kim's happiness does not last long, however, as Jim's sudden appearance disrupts the moment, startling Edward, who accidentally cuts Kim's hand while turning around. Jealous that Kim is evidently attracted to Edward and therefore eager to wreak revenge on him, Jim takes advantage of the situation and makes it look like Edward injured Kim on purpose, reproaching him for being unable to touch anything without destroying it; in other words, Jim's transformation into the Gothic villain is complete. Intimidated, touched in a sore spot, and feeling misperceived once more, Edward runs away. While in a heated argument Kim breaks up with Jim, who is outraged that she is rejecting him in favor of a “freak” that is “not even human,” Edward wreaks havoc in the neighborhood, mutilating the topiaries he created and pricking tires. For

²¹⁴ Burton has complained that some people have asked where the ice in this scene comes from, considering that the film is set in Florida. For him, the ice has above all a symbolic function. By his own account, Burton has always appreciated “a certain amount of symbolism, a certain amount of interpretation and abstraction,” which allow to “connect with something on a subconscious level” rather than calling for intellectualization (Burton and Salisbury 94).

Esmeralda he has a special present: a demonstration of Burton's black humor, he cuts the bush in front of her window into the shape of the devil. The tearing off of the clothes Peg gave him, revealing his original black outfit, not only signals that Edward is now his old self again, but also his realization that despite all efforts and a suburban disguise he will always remain a misperceived outsider.

Much like in Whale's *Frankenstein*, the film's grand finale is heralded by the formation of a mob of angry villagers, or rather angry suburbanites (dressed in absurd Christmas dresses), in pursuit of the castaway. While the police are looking for Edward and the whole neighborhood is in a stir, Peg is sad and disappointed. She had meant well for Edward, but now she realizes that it might be best for him to return to his Gothic mansion because "at least there he's safe." Burton thus once again inverts horror conventions: it is not the commonly uncanny Gothic mansion, but the suburban environment, usually perceived as a peaceful place, that becomes the site of terror. In the midst of the turmoil, Kim and Edward, who is hiding from the police in the Boggs' house, get another chance for a romantic encounter. When Kim asks Edward to hold her, however, Edward dolefully replies: "I can't"; a statement that implies both his inability to hold her because of his scissorhands and his fear of hurting her again. But Kim simply puts his arms around her, and they finally entwine in a loving embrace. Here the camera zooms in on Edward's face, introducing another, particularly painful and haunting flashback. It was also around Christmas that Edward's inventor/father gave him a pair of hands as an early Christmas present. While Edward was carefully examining his present with his scissorhands, however, his creator suffered a stroke. The smile suddenly vanishing from his hardening face, the inventor/father collapsed, and the pair of hands, which he was holding up like an ideal mirror image to Edward's scissorhands, were speared and destroyed; the cut-up hands a symbol of his dashed hopes of a normal life. The flashback reveals just how much Edward wishes that he had real hands so that he could touch Kim.

The situation escalates when Edward falls victim to yet another misunderstanding. On their way back to Kim's house, Jim and his friend, both drunk, almost run over Kevin, who is on his way home from a friend's house, but Edward rushes out of the house and saves him at the last minute. Clumsy with his scissorhands, however, he repeatedly cuts Kevin's face as they are lying on the ground, which the neighbors interpret as an attack – Burton's fast editing together with Elfman's portentous score heightens the tension of the scene. When Jim attacks Edward, who cuts him in self-defense, and the police are about to arrive at the scene, Kim realizes that there is only one way out for Edward, and she tells him to run. The police and the

mob follow Edward to the gate of his estate at the foot of the hill, but only the police officer (Dick Anthony Williams) goes after him. Suddenly, shots are heard; but the camera reveals that the officer, who has had pity with Edward all along, has only fired in the air, allowing him to escape. Returning to the crowd, however, the officer purports that Edward is dead. Yet – as becomes an angry mob – the neighbors want proof of his death. As in the story of Frankenstein’s monster, it turns out that it is not the creature, but the society that expels it that is the real monster.

Meanwhile, Kim is on her way up to the mansion, where she finds Edward in his dark attic. As always when Kim and Edward have a moment alone, however, Jim suddenly appears and brutally tries to kill Edward.²¹⁵ It is when Jim attacks Kim that Edward finally has enough, which Burton shows in a close-up of his determined and angry face. Spearing Jim with his blades – the camera alternately taking Edward’s and Jim’s point of view as Edward drives him towards a window – Edward finally kills his opponent and Jim crashes through the window. As the mob arrives at the mansion, Kim and Edward know that this is goodbye, and they make their farewells with the kiss that had been denied them (and the viewer) for so long; in other words, as in the story of *Beauty and the Beast*, Edward is unable to consummate his love for Kim (Burton and Salisbury 99). When Kim eventually tells Edward that she loves him, a close-up of his face as he closes his eyes, underscored by Edward’s romantic theme, shows that for him this is a moment of entire happiness.²¹⁶ Leaving Edward behind – a long shot of whom, surrounded by a web of shadows that visually imprisons him, indicating that from now on he will be trapped in the mansion – and knowing that as long as the neighbors have no “proof” of Edward’s death they will not leave him alone, Kim takes a spare scissorhand she finds in the mansion and shows it to the mob (who has incidentally gathered around the hand-shaped topiary in Edward’s yard), telling them that Edward and Jim, whose body they have already discovered, killed each other; her bloody dress provides further evidence of the fight. Following a Gothic convention, order is thus restored in the end; however, in Burton’s film this means the restoration of order on both sides, for the suburban neighborhood as much as for Edward.

At this point, Burton leaves the fairy tale and returns to the bedroom from the film’s beginning, where the grandmother tells her granddaughter that Kim never saw Edward again

²¹⁵ Jay Carr has argued that the film here suddenly introduces “a kind of violence for which we haven’t been adequately prepared.” Although this is true, it serves the film’s purpose to show who the real – and by far more aggressive – monster is, namely corrupt society, here represented by Jim.

²¹⁶ In the DVD audio commentary, Burton stated that he did not want a conventional happy ending for his film; instead he chose a bittersweet fairy-tale-like ending, including revenge and a moment of love, knowing that his viewers would equally appreciate this (cf. audio commentary).

after this night. When the granddaughter asks her grandmother how she knows this and learns that her grandmother is in fact Kim (Winona Ryder in old-woman makeup) – in other words, the fairy tale turns out to be the flashback of a true story – she suggests that she could still go up to the mansion to see Edward; but Kim replies that she is an old woman now and would rather have him remember her the way she was. Here, the camera briefly cuts to Edward's mansion, where he, looking as young as ever, is trimming his topiaries, before it cuts back to the bedroom. In reply to her granddaughter's question how she knows that Edward is still alive (which was in fact indicated by a lit window at the beginning of the film), the grandmother explains that it never snowed before he came down to her neighborhood, but afterwards it did, and she confesses that she still sometimes dances in the snow. On this cue, Burton cuts to Edward for the last time, and to the sound of the crescendoing final theme, he is shown carving more ice sculptures in his attic, whirling up millions of snow flakes.

6.2. Reimagining the Legend of Irving's Headless Horseman: *Sleepy Hollow* (1999)

Heads Will Roll.

(Tagline for *Sleepy Hollow*)

We are dealing with a madman!

(Constable Ichabod Crane)

Unlike Burton's bittersweet Frankensteinian fairy tale *Edward Scissorhands*, which besides a number of salient Gothic elements rather plays with conventional notions of horror and inverts Gothic conventions, *Sleepy Hollow* is a full-blown Gothic horror picture working along traditional Gothic lines and rich in Gothic imagery, whose uncanny atmosphere permeates the entire film from opening credits to end title. The first three and a half minutes of the movie not only introduce the underlying mystery of *Sleepy Hollow*, keeping the viewers in suspense as to what they are dealing with, but also at once make it abundantly clear that this is a Gothic horror picture. Beginning with an image of a blood-like liquid dripping onto what is then revealed to be the testament of one Mr. Van Garrett (the red liquid in fact being sealing wax), Burton soon plunges his audience right into a first scene of classic Gothic terror: hurriedly driving through fog-shrouded corn fields at night, thunder rumbling and the dark sky frequently lit by lightning (all familiar visual ingredients of Gothic horror), Van Garrett's carriage is suddenly attacked by a mysterious horseman. When Van Garrett (Martin Landau), already somewhat frightened by the sight of a – typically Burtonesque – scarecrow with a pumpkin head standing eerily in a field, suddenly has the feeling of an uncanny presence and then hears an angry neigh and the sound of a blade being drawn, only to realize with horror seconds later that the mysterious Other has chopped off the carriage-driver's head, he jumps out of the moving carriage in panic and tries to escape. Running into the corn field – the camera alternately focusing on the terrified Van Garrett in medium close-ups and showing Van Garrett's point of view – he is scared to death when he suddenly runs into another huge scarecrow with a pumpkin head, effectively lit by a lightning flash. The moment of relief upon his error does not last long, however: slowly turning around at the renewed sound of a horse snorting behind him and a blade being drawn, the camera suddenly rapidly moves in on Van Garrett's shocked face as the horseman – whom the viewers in fact never get to see in this scene, but whose position they now assume in a POV shot – cuts his head off, leaving only the stump of his neck, streaming with blood. Danny Elfman's portentous score, setting the film's ominous tone; the increasingly rapid, staccato cutting (the skilled work of editors Chris Lebenzon and Joel Negron); and the use of an unsteady, sometimes hand-held camera

all add to the tense atmosphere of this scene, which Burton fittingly ends with a close-up of the scarecrow's pumpkin head with its evil grin, as Van Garrett's blood splashes across it. It is important to note that throughout the film the color red is emphasized in otherwise predominantly colorless scenes, which creates an artificiality that adds to the film's overall fairy-tale quality that Burton aimed at.

The next scene, set in the grim and crime-infested city of New York in 1799 (a typical suburban Gothic setting), introduces the film's protagonist, another one of Burton's antiheroes (who in the course of the film develops hero potential, though): Constable Ichabod Crane (Johnny Depp).²¹⁷ A prime example of the new enlightened man and thus a strong advocate of scientific methods to solve crimes, he appears before the burgomaster – played by Hammer horror film icon Christopher Lee (see chapter 5), whose films Burton had watched as a youth – at the Municipal Watchhouse to express his strong disapproval of the prevailing “medieval” crime investigation system. Annoyed by Crane's complaint, the burgomaster orders him to take his “experimentations” upstate to the town of Sleepy Hollow, an isolated Dutch farming community in the Hudson highlands, to investigate the mysterious murders of three people who were all decapitated, their heads taken – it was in fact the first of these unspeakable murders that was shown at the beginning of the film. Obviously a disciplinary measure, the burgomaster dismisses Crane with a telling warning: “Remember, it is you, Ichabod Crane, who is now put to the test.” Packing his tools and books in his attic laboratory (a typically Burtonesque locale) and setting his red pet cardinal bird free – a trope that keeps reappearing throughout the film – Crane eventually departs for Sleepy Hollow. While journeying through autumnal landscapes that partly look like dark versions of Hudson-River-School paintings and forests – onto which somewhat spectral opening credits are superimposed, which uncannily appear and dissolve like fog, hinting at the film's main theme of deceiving appearances (a Burton favorite) – a number of things are revealed about Crane and the case:²¹⁸ Crane is easily frightened, which shows when he cringes at the howling of a

²¹⁷ Burton's choice to cast Hollywood star Johnny Depp in this role probably helped the renegotiation of Irving's story for a contemporary audience, Depp's appearance differing considerably from that of Irving's protagonist: “He was tall, but exceedingly lank, with narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, hands that dangled a mile out of his sleeves, feet that might have served for shovels, and his whole frame most loosely hung together. His head was small, and flat at top, with huge ears, large green glassy eyes, and a long snipe nose ..., one might have mistaken him for ... some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield” (191).

²¹⁸ According to Tammi K. Groft (et. al.), the Hudson River School, considered “to be the first American school of painting, ... consisted of two generations of artists working from the 1820s through the 1870s who painted primarily landscapes,” their subject matter ranging “from sublime views of the wilderness to beautiful, pastoral scenes to allegorical pictures with moral and even political messages” (112; cf. Gothic art, chapter 2.1.). Washington Irving, the author of “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” and “Rip Van Winkle,” among others, was among those nineteenth-century American writers who “began to look back on the history of the Hudson Valley and its significance in shaping regional and national cultural identities” (95). According to Burton, the Hudson

wolf; moreover, his book contains the names of the decapitated victims, namely Peter Van Garrett, “a prominent land owner,” and his son Dirk as well as a widow by the name of Emily Winship.

When Crane finally arrives at Sleepy Hollow – like the isolated Gothic mansion in *Edward Scissorhands* a typically heterotopic setting – it appears rather uninviting (in part thanks to Rick Heinrich’s drab production design). Surrounded by a gloomy forest – according to Burke the place where the sublime “comes upon us” (60); shrouded in foggy dampness; and with a cemetery right at the town’s entrance that greets anyone who comes by with a sense of death, Sleepy Hollow is Burton’s Gothicized variation on Irving’s “drowsy, dreamy” and “enchanted” valley (273); the haunting atmosphere of which is nicely captured by Emmanuel Lubezki’s monochromatic cinematography. As Crane walks through the seemingly deserted town, he notices that people are eying him suspiciously from their windows before closing them; a rather unwelcoming gesture that emphasizes both the townspeople’s caginess and Crane’s status as an outsider in town. He also discovers that the people of Sleepy Hollow have erected a well-secured watchtower from where guards watch the edge of the forest, which indicates that the townspeople must be alert to some kind of danger lurking in the woods and thus creates a sense of foreboding; this behavior in fact reflects the general wilderness paranoia common among early Americans that Irving had also captured in his original tale. A little outside town, Crane eventually reaches the Van Tassel estate, his accommodation for the time of his investigation. An establishing shot (in fact, a digital matte painting) reveals a large, fog-shrouded Gothic mansion looming on a hill surrounded by a grain field and dead-looking trees, a pumpkin-headed scarecrow at the roadside greeting the visitor. On entering, a boisterous Halloween party is in full swing – in O’Hehir view a clear sign that “terror has driven the town’s social life indoors” – and it is here that Crane meets Katrina Van Tassel (Christina Ricci) for the first time.²¹⁹ Their attraction for one another is immediately obvious, much to the chagrin of her suitor and his future rival Brom Van Brunt (Caspar Van Dien). Despite a seemingly hearty welcome by Baltus Van Tassel (Michael Gambon), a wealthy landowner, and his wife (Miranda Richardson), the alarmed glances he and some of the town’s men exchange reveal that they are also less than thrilled about Crane’s obviously inconvenient visit.

Valley “feels haunted”: “you can go to lots of places in Europe and feel haunted, but the Hudson Valley’s got a very strong feeling of that, too” (Burton and Salisbury 169).

²¹⁹ Throughout the film, Katrina is mostly dressed in white and she also rides a white horse. This in combination with her blond hair (which, in Burton’s view, always has a fairy-tale quality) gives her an innocent, beautiful appearance. Like Kim in *Edward Scissorhands*, Katrina is thus the typical Gothic ingénue.

In a meeting convened by Van Tassel in his library to discuss the mysterious murder cases, Crane makes the acquaintance of some of Sleepy Hollow's leading men besides the host, whose dominant role in the community is immediately clear: Doctor Lancaster (Ian McDiarmid), Reverend Steenwyck (Jeffrey Jones), Magistrate Philipse (Richard Griffiths), and Notary Hardenbrook (Michael Gough), some of whom seem to know more than they are willing to disclose and thus have an ambiguousness about them. What Crane does learn, however, is that the heads of the three victims were apparently never found and allegedly taken "back to hell" by the Headless Horseman (Christopher Walken). A flashback, underscored by menacing music, visualizes Van Tassel's gruesome account: sent to "these shores ... to keep Americans under the yoke of England" and mounted on a black steed named Daredevil, the Hessian mercenary, with teeth "filed down to sharp points" and icy blue eyes, was not interested in money, but in carnage, zealously chopping off heads in battle – in Gothic terms, he was an utterly sublime appearance, the quintessential Gothic Other. In the winter of 1779, not far from Sleepy Hollow in the Western Woods – a "haunted place where brave men will not venture," Van Tassel warningly adds – he was finally decapitated when one of two little sisters he ran into while hiding in the forest maliciously gave away his location. Now, after twenty years, the "seed of evil" that was buried in the ground that day has returned, on the rampage and "cutting off heads where he finds them." Although visibly shaken by the story, Crane finally pulls himself together and dismisses Van Tassel's account as nothing but superstitious belief. As becomes an enlightened man from the city, he does not believe in the return of the dead; "murder needs no ghost come from the grave," he says. But Van Tassel reminds him that he is "a long way from New York," implying that the rules of the world he knows might not apply to the heterotopic world of Sleepy Hollow. Following classic Gothic convention, the film thus contrasts enlightened views and superstitious beliefs. However, since at least some people in the room seem so eager to convince Crane that a supernatural force is behind the murders, the impression is conveyed that they are trying to scare him away, which creates suspense.

It is not long before Crane's enlightened views are put to the test (just as the burgomaster had unwittingly proclaimed) and Burton invokes Todorov's fantastic (see chapter 1) when the barbarous murder of Jonathan Masbath (Mark Spalding), the fourth victim, appears to have been committed by the Headless Horseman. Burton's visualization of the scene, shot in monochromatic blue tones and underscored by ominous music as well as the occasional hooting of an owl, effectively evokes terror, resulting in a truly sublime experience: while on guard duty in the watchtower at night and watching the edge of the

forest, Masbath's view (imitated in POV shots and thus involving the audience) is obscured by wafts of mist, which creates a strong sense of foreboding; especially when strange streams of fog reach out from the forest and extinguish the torches along its edge. Suddenly, deer emerging from the fog in panic indicate a threatening presence, and the soon following rataplan of hooves – which is audible, but the camera shows nothing but Masbath's terrified face – suggests that it is the Headless Horseman. Seconds later, a rapidly-cut and thus particularly thrilling scene shows Masbath running through the dark forest, mercilessly pursued by what appears to be the Hessian mercenary. Crosscutting between the mortally terrified Masbath running for his life and the headless horseman (in one shot, his head is “cut off” by the upper edge of the frame) catching up with his victim – the audience's view partly obscured by trees and darkness, which increases the level of tension and ambiguity – the camera eventually shows the horseman drawing his sword while gaining on Masbath and finally decapitating him. Burton ends the scene with an eerie close-up of the still rolling head as it comes to a halt, a flash of lightning revealing Masbath's horror-stricken face staring into the camera.

Providing relief from such scenes of terror and horror, *Sleepy Hollow* frequently features comic scenes or moments, which underline Crane's role of the antihero. When he picks up Gunpowder – a stolid horse that obviously does not live up to its name and thus adds to the often comic appearance of Crane – and is suddenly called to the scene of Masbath's murder, for example, he is initially unable to control the horse, and despite his desperate protest, it thus departs in the wrong direction. Depp's expressive performance of Crane's generally fussy and squeamish behavior – despite his profession, the constable is highly sensitive to shocking sights, especially the sight of blood – and his simultaneously feigned toughness and scientific demeanor is also rather tongue-in-cheek.²²⁰ For example, when Crane asks Lancaster whether he moved the body, which the doctor confirms, Crane reproaches him with the words “you must never move the body”; from a forensic point of view, a logical comment. When the doctor asks why, however, Crane only replies “because”; in Kevorkian's view, “the unexplained dictate of one who makes up the rules as he goes along.” It comes as no surprise that his rather grotesque investigation methods and bizarre equipment, including a portable mini-laboratory and an odd-looking pair of binoculars, earn him skeptical looks from the town's men gathered at the crime scene (and probably some laughs from the audience).²²¹

²²⁰ As Burton put it, Crane is a “male action adventure hero who's portrayed like a thirteen-year-old girl” (audio commentary).

²²¹ Interestingly, Crane's binoculars serve to gain knowledge through seeing (visual analysis). This is obviously a reference to the emergence of a new scientific rationalism, beginning with the Age of Enlightenment, which in turn had a great influence on the evolution of the Gothic (see chapter 2.1.).

At Masbath's funeral (the gloomy atmosphere enhanced by a dark and turbulent sky), Crane not only meets Young Masbath (Marc Pickering), the victim's orphaned son, who becomes his assistant, but he also learns from Philipse that there were in fact not four, but five murder victims buried in only four graves. Before Philipse can reveal more, however, Steenwyck's disapproving look silences the magistrate, adding to the general mystery. As becomes a good investigator, Philipse's information induces Crane to exhume the victims and perform an autopsy on the widow, who has a suspicious scar on her stomach. The "operation" in Lancaster's office is another example of *Sleepy Hollow*'s highly comic scenes. Flipping through his anatomy book rather erratically and examining the body with the help of one of his self-designed instruments while wearing the odd-looking binoculars again (which give him a rather peculiar appearance), Crane is suddenly splashed in the face by a squirt of blood. When he eventually emerges from the doctor's office, his face and apron covered in blood as if he had butchered someone, to reveal that the widow was pregnant and informs the townspeople gathered on the street, who look at him with horror, that "we are dealing with a madman," the film ironically suggests that the madman is Crane himself, although he is obviously referring to the murderer.

According to Burton, one of the main inspirations for his film was the (rather faithful) 1949 Disney cartoon adaptation of Irving's legend he remembered from his childhood.²²² This is clearly visible in the scene in which Crane himself becomes the victim of a terrifying pursuit, which was in fact meant as a tribute (cf. audio commentary); a scene that in Burton's view has "a very good mixture of humour and scariness – a sort of fun, energetic, visceral kind of scariness" (Burton and Salisbury 167). Riding across a covered bridge on a gloomy day, toads uncannily croaking what sounds like "Ichabod," Crane suddenly hears the sound of hooves and a horse neighing behind him. Slowly turning around – the camera, which was following Crane, showing his back, now cuts to a POV shot to imitate his view – he at first does not see anyone. A moment later, however, an apparently headless horseman carrying a jack-o'-lantern in one of his hands comes into sight at the other end of the bridge. Terrified, Crane spurs his horse and rides into the fog-shrouded forest, the horseman in hot pursuit. At the scene's climactic moment, the headless horseman throws the burning pumpkin at Crane, hitting him in the head. The way the pumpkin with its evil grin, wrapped in flames and flying towards the camera, was filmed, looks almost exactly as in the Disney version. The scene, in which "the major action of Irving's legend [is buried]" (Kevorkian) before the film abandons the original tale once and for all, has an important function in Burton's version: when the

²²² Disney's animated adaptation *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad*, narrated by Bing Crosby, consisted of two segments, "The Wind in the Willows" and "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow."

headless horseman is revealed as no less a person than Crane's rival Van Brunt, this creates ambiguity as to whether the legend's supernatural Headless Horseman exists at all.

Perhaps as a result of the bump to his head, Crane has a bad dream in which he is haunted by traumatic childhood memories; or in Gothic terms, the repressed past returns, tormenting the protagonist's mind. In fact, this is only the first in a series of particularly Gothic, oedipal nightmare-flashbacks, always caused by pain or great distress, which Burton employs throughout the film. In these fairy-tale-like (that is, both enchanting and violent) mindscreens (cf. chapter 3), in which the intimate togetherness of the seven-year-old Crane (Sam Fior) and his mother (Lisa Marie) is brutally destroyed by his strictly religious father (Peter Guinness), who in one instance looks like the Headless Horseman, it is gradually revealed that his mother was a white witch, "an innocent child of nature," and was therefore tortured to death by her husband. When Young Crane discovered his mother's body in an iron maiden, he not only injured his hands on one of the torture instruments; but as a result of the events, he also lost his faith, inducing him to henceforth believe in "sense and reason, cause and consequence." The torture scenes were obviously inspired by Hammer horror and Corman's "AIPoe" films (especially their foregrounding of the color red); Crane's mother in the iron maiden, in particular, is unmistakably a homage to Barbara Steele in the same situation in both Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* (1960) and Corman's *Pit and the Pendulum* (cf. chapter 5 and 5.2.). Interestingly, in contrast to the gloomy, colorless world of *Sleepy Hollow*, the world of Crane's bad dreams is always brightly colored; both the happy scenes showing Young Crane and his mother – for example, as he watches her dance in a blooming orchard or as he watches her playing with a thaumatrope showing a red cardinal in a cage (calling to mind the pet bird Crane set free at the beginning of the film)²²³ – and the scenes in the torture chamber. However, the color scheme of the nightmares is misleading, as their content is hardly positive. As in *Edward Scissorhands*, Burton thus reverses the conventional association of bright colors with positive events.

That his childhood memories are real and not just bad dreams is revealed later on when Katrina notices what looks like torture marks on Crane's palms and he explains that he has had these marks ever since he can remember, implying a traumatic event in early childhood, and when he furthermore gives her his mother's thaumatrope as a gift. Katrina provides Crane with crucial information: not only does he learn that Lady Van Tassel, who

²²³ Throughout the film, Burton repeatedly makes reference to the early beginnings of film (cf. audio commentary). The early visual gadget of the thaumatrope (cf. chapter 2.1.), in particular – "no magic," but "what we call optics"; "it is truth, but truth is not always appearance," as Crane later explains – which obviously serves as a symbol for the film's theme of the deceptiveness of appearances, calls attention to film's illusory potential; as does the magic lantern which is featured later in the film as a means to create a haunting atmosphere.

was a nurse to the late Mrs. Van Tassel, Katrina's mother, is Van Tassel's second wife; but she also tells him that virtually all families in Sleepy Hollow are connected "by blood and marriage" (thus introducing the classic Gothic theme of incestuous relationships). Moreover, he finds out that the Van Garrett's used to be the wealthiest family in town and in fact supported Katrina's father financially when he first came to Sleepy Hollow. After presenting Crane with a book entitled *A Compendium of Spell, Charms, and Devices of the Spirit World*, which he is to wear close to his heart as a means of protection – a gift he initially rejects because his enlightened mind leaves no room for superstitious beliefs – Katrina also shows him the fog-shrouded ruins of the cottage where she used to live before her father became a wealthy man.²²⁴ It is here that, kneeling down before the old hearth with a posy of blue flowers in one hand, she suddenly begins to draw magic symbols – just like Crane's mother in his nightmare – revealing that Katrina is also a witch; unsurprisingly, the scene visibly irritates him.

Crane eventually has to reconsider his attitude towards the supernatural once and for all when he encounters the real Headless Horseman himself; in other words, the legend suddenly becomes a terrifying reality.²²⁵ It is at this moment in the film, then, that the fantastic gives way to the marvelous, that is, the supernatural is now accepted as "an integral part of reality" (Todorov 25; see chapter 1). Confronting Philipse to educe the identity of the widow's unborn child's father, Crane is annoyed when the magistrate refuses to reveal a name, out of "mortal dread of powers against which there is no defense" (a quarrel between the town's leading men shown earlier suggests that he is referring to them) and instead goes on about his superstitious belief in the Headless Horseman. The minute Crane insists on his nonexistence, however, panicking sheep suddenly indicate an imminent threat, calling to mind the scene of Masbath's death. Portentous music, lightning flashes, and the squeaking sound of a scarecrow moving in the wind as well as the camera zooming in on Philipse's tense face as he tries to make out something in the foggy woods enhance the already ominous atmosphere before the (by now familiar) sound of a horse neighing and the clopping of hooves eventually herald the arrival of the Headless Horseman on his awe-inspiring steed, who emerges from the fog-shrouded forest at a terrific speed moments later. Before Crane knows what is happening, the Hessian mercenary passes him and cuts off the magistrate's head; which after spinning on his neck for some time falls to the ground and rolls down the hill towards the horrified Crane

²²⁴ Interestingly, their arrival is shown in an establishing shot that calls to mind certain Gothic paintings by Caspar David Friedrich (see chapter 2.1.), such as *The Abbey in the Oakwood* (1809-10).

²²⁵ Burton has explained that he liked the idea of Crane and the Headless Horseman as adversaries because Crane "is a character that lives basically inside of his head" whereas his opponent is "a character with no head" at all (making-of audio commentary).

where it eventually comes to halt between his legs, facing him (which the camera shows in an eerie close-up). When the horseman finally rides towards Crane and it looks as though he is about to behead him, but instead spears the magistrate's head with his sword right before Crane's eyes, this is too much for the highly sensitive constable and he faints.

Upon his recovery from a nervous breakdown caused by the encounter with the real Headless Horseman – which once more exposes the antihero's squeamishness – Crane decides to uncover the mystery surrounding the “murdering ghost” – much to the discomfort of the town's leading men. The first step in the establishment of the truth takes Crane and Young Masbath to a dimly-lit cave in the forest where they meet a veiled witch; a scene, complete with traditional horror film moments of shock, that nicely shows Burton's penchant for tongue-in-cheek horror: in order to protect himself upon entering the cave, Crane cowardly uses Young Masbath as a shield; yet, an awkward pun later,²²⁶ Crane ends up alone with the witch, who performs a bizarre magic ritual (involving a grotesque variant of a Medusa's head) that reveals the Tree of the Dead as the location of the Headless Horseman's grave. Crane and Young Masbath are soon joined by Katrina; a first kiss as a sign of Crane's appreciation is unintentionally prevented by his young assistant, however, depriving the two lovers and the viewer of a romantic encounter, when he discovers the Tree of the Dead (one of the spine-tingling additions to Irving's legend), which Burton presents in an uncanny establishing shot: tall (emphasized by the camera slowly moving up alongside its trunk while focusing on the characters on the ground as they increasingly diminish in size), dead, and shrouded in mist, with branches looking like whirling arms and its upper part resembling a monstrously roaring face, the gnarled, twisted tree is a downright sublime appearance.²²⁷ Crane's examination of the blood-dripping tree has a distinct splatter-movie aesthetic to it (cf. chapter 6); however, due to the exaggerated use of blood and gore which is furthermore stylized throughout the film, Burton avoids realistic horror. Crane's determined hacking at the tree roots, although blood repeatedly splashes across his face, is rather comic. The eventual uncovering of the missing heads of the murder victims, however, shown in lurid close-ups and underscored by crescendoing music, creates a spine-tingling effect. This is topped moments later in a scene that once more exhibits the film's impressive special effects. A thunderstorm approaching – as usual a harbinger of horror – Crane discovers the Hessian's grave and notices that his skull is missing. He then realizes that the Horseman will return from the grave

²²⁶ Upon entering the cave, Crane assures the witch that he is not making assumptions about her occupation. When he unintentionally keeps repeating the word “which” (which is homophonic with the word “witch”), however, this reveals that this is precisely what he is doing.

²²⁷ In order to make the tree, which was built on a sound stage in Shepperton, England, appear large, the visual trick of false perspective was employed.

and collect heads until his own head is restored to him. Moments later, the camera focuses on the heads, which first begin to move mysteriously and are then suddenly pushed aside as first a hoof and then the entire Headless Horseman on his horse emerge from inside the tree – the gate to the netherworld.

Before long, more victims are claimed. This time, a whole family, including a little child, is deprived of their heads by the Horseman in their own home; that is, for the first time, the Hessian has transgressed the boundary between the wilderness and the civilized world and murdered inside Sleepy Hollow. Alarmed by the child's death scream, Van Brunt arrives at the scene and tries to kill the Headless Horseman, but to no avail, since obviously, he is already dead. Interestingly, however, the Horseman does not claim Van Brunt's head; as Crane, joining the scene, explains, he is simply not after him. It is only because Van Brunt keeps attacking the Hessian that he is eventually killed. Crane, who has actually fought bravely alongside his former rival, is severely injured by the Horseman, but cured with the help of Katrina's magic potions. As Van Tassel and Lancaster are gathered around his sickbed, he reveals to them what he has found out – which obviously troubles them, as close-ups of the two men's faces show: the Horseman does not only not kill at random, but he is in fact controlled by the person in possession of his head, and it is this person who chooses the victims. Later on, waking from another one of his nightmares, Katrina asks Crane about his bad memories, and he tells her what the flashbacks have already revealed. For the first time, he also voices his infatuation with her, claiming that she has "bewitched" him.

As before, Crane's recovery seems to have instilled him with new investigative energy, and with the help of Young Masbath he uncovers a secret conspiracy that points to Van Tassel. Before Van Garrett was murdered, he had made a new testament (witnessed by Jonathan Masbath), which instead of bequeathing his son left his entire fortune to the pregnant Widow Winship, whom he had secretly married. After Van Garrett's son was also murdered, the new testament now stood in the way of whoever would have inherited the Van Garrett fortune as the next of kin: Van Tassel. Due to their professions, the four town eldest were drawn into the murdering plot, allegedly against their will, as Hardenbrook claims when Crane confronts him in his office: Reverend Steenwyck had performed the secret marriage; Doctor Lancaster had attended the pregnant widow; Magistrate Philipse provided protection of the law; and Notary Hardenbrook hid the documents.²²⁸ Crane, whose investigations cause considerable unease among the people involved, some of whom have taken great pains to hide their secret (a difficult thing to do in such a small community), soon has to fear for his

²²⁸ As Arnold has pointed out, Burton and Walker's reimagination is thus "based on the most fundamental patriarchal concern: the acquisition and subsequent hereditary transfer of land."

wellbeing. In his attic room, he is not only shocked by a dangerous-looking spider (a great moment of Depp's squeamish acting);²²⁹ but Masbath also finds the magic symbol of the "evil eye" on the floor underneath Crane's bed, which, he assumes, someone secretly drew to cast a spell against him.²³⁰ As it turns out, it was Katrina; hurt that Crane accuses her father, she has also turned against the constable and burned the evidence he has gathered so far. This, in turn, pains Crane, who in his opinion is only doing what he has to do as an investigator, regardless of his personal feelings; that is, he has to accept the evidence as it is and is "pinioned by a chain of reasoning," even if it grieves him. Like many of Burton's other (anti-)heroes, then, Crane is misperceived and consequently repudiated.

The situation escalates when Hardenbrook hangs himself and Van Tassel panics when after the Horseman has killed his wife in the woods on their way to the church, where the townspeople have gathered to "speak out against" Crane, the mercenary goes after him. With the Hessian's arrival, again accompanied by lightning, the church – which stands out strongly against the drab rest of the town and the ominous night sky with its white paint that adds to its demarcation as a sacred place – becomes a refuge since he is unable to enter sacred ground. Inside, hell breaks loose as people fear for the lives, or heads rather. Burton emphasizes the agitated atmosphere by fast cuts; a series of medium close-ups that throw the audience right into the fray; and the constant sound of clamor and shooting. Before long, Van Tassel and Steenwyck clash violently because the reverend thinks that it is Van Tassel who is putting them all in danger. To his great bewilderment, Van Tassel then learns that he has fallen victim to a conspiracy. Hoping to prevent further damage, Lancaster confesses, but before he can reveal the whole story, Steenwyck kills him with a huge wooden cross. At this, Van Tassel shoots Steenwyck. The camera now rapidly crosscuts between Van Tassel, as he ascends the church gallery trying to defend himself against the angry townspeople, and the Horseman, who has meanwhile come up with a gruesome plan to get to Van Tassel after all: using a fencepost and a rope as a sort of harpoon, he shoots Van Tassel on the gallery the minute he announces that he will uncover the conspiracy – in Burton's view, "a real Hammer moment" (audio commentary). Burton's visualization of the scene again calls to mind the splatter film: after Van Tassel is gored by the fencepost, blood spouting, the Horseman yanks him through

²²⁹ It is interesting to note that Crane always dwells or works in an attic (one of Burton's favorite settings); he moves from his attic laboratory in New York to the attic room in the Van Tassel house. The attic as an isolated place seems to reflect his outsider status; Crane never fits in because he always presents a threat to the status quo, either due to his unconventional methods (New York) or because he might uncover the truth (*Sleepy Hollow*).

²³⁰ According to Burton, the pink chalk used for the drawing on the floor, which clearly stands out in the otherwise colorless scene, served to emphasize the film's fairy-tale quality (cf. audio commentary).

the church window and tears his gurgling victim across the lawn until he is off sacred ground. There, he chops off his head and disappears back into the night.

When Van Tassel is killed, Crane assumes that it was not Van Tassel but Katrina who was behind the murders. He thinks that he was deceived by her appearance; that she was hiding behind the “mask of virtue” the entire time. Bitterly disappointed, he decides to return to New York. Masbath reproaches him for suspecting Katrina, and when Crane explains that he has good reason, Masbath replies that he must be “bewitched by reason” then; in other words, he implies that despite his enlightened views, Crane is not in the least superior to those under the yoke of superstition. It is not long before Crane returns to Sleepy Hollow, though; ironically, it is the thaumatrope, the emblem of deceptive appearance, which finally opens his eyes. Back in town, he immediately examines Lady Van Tassel’s corpse, and his suspicion is confirmed: it is not her body but that of someone else; ergo, Lady Van Tassel is still alive. By means of a clever deception maneuver, she had staged her death, deceiving even her own husband: earlier in the film, Crane had witnessed a mysterious scene in which Lady Van Tassel had cut her own hand while engaged in a secret sexual encounter with Steenwyck in the woods; afterwards, she had killed a servant girl, removed the girl’s head to prevent identification, dressed her in her clothes, and cut the girl’s hand the same way. Finally realizing what is going on and that Katrina as Van Tassel’s heir is in mortal danger, he sets out to save her.

Like Whale’s *Frankenstein* and *Frankenweenie*, one of Burton’s reimaginings of the Frankenstein story, *Sleepy Hollow*’s climax is set in a windmill, which in fact closely resembles that of Whale’s film (the windmill was also depicted on the Van Garrett family logo). It is here that Lady Van Tassel – a prime example not only of the wicked stepmother known from fairy tales, whose now loose hair gives her a somewhat mad appearance; but also of the “serial-killer psychopath” (McMahan 73) – conjures up the Headless Horseman in a magic ritual, just as she had done so many times before, as it turns out; only this time, it is Katrina’s head he is to claim. Cutting to the Tree of the Dead, again shown in monochromatic blue tones to evoke a mystic atmosphere, the camera shows the mercenary on his horse emerging from the netherworld and dashing through the forest on his way to the next victim. Back at the windmill, while waiting for the Horseman, Lady Van Tassel passes the time by revealing the mystery – frequently interrupted by brief cuts showing the Hessian (the threat) and Crane (the rescuer) on their way to the windmill, thereby increasing suspense: upon her father’s death, the landlord (Van Garrett) evicted her family from their home, and because her mother was suspected of witchcraft, no one would give them shelter; henceforth, she, her

sister (the witch Crane had met in the cave), and her mother thus lived as outcasts in the forest, even after her mother died. Here, the film cuts to the first flashback again, and it is revealed that the little girl who maliciously gave away the Horseman's location in the Western Woods was in fact the young Lady Van Tassel, who took his head after he was decapitated in order to have him avenge her. In other words, it was in the form of the Hessian that the sins of the fathers literally revisited the people of Sleepy Hollow. Because Van Tassel and his family had moved into their old cottage, she plotted to become his wife, rid herself of his first wife and daughter, and that way secure his fortune. She then had everyone in her way murdered by the Horseman or gained control over them by having an affair with the reverend, by threatening the notary and the magistrate, and by blackmailing the doctor.

Once more, lightning heralds the Horseman's coming. Shortly before he arrives at the ominously fog-shrouded scene, however, Crane joins Katrina and Masbath (who had been hiding in the windmill and thus witnessed Lady Van Tassel's revelation), and the three barricade themselves in the mill. Incidentally, when Lady Van Tassel teasingly warns them to watch their heads as they enter, this is one of the film's many self-ironic comic interjections which frequently mitigate its horror quality and thus provide a moment of relief in tense situations. Before long, however, the Horseman, endowed with supernatural strength and speed, breaks into the windmill and follows the three up the stairs, past the enormous machinery (which once again calls to mind the torture chamber in Corman's *Pit and the Pendulum*), to the roof, from where they try to escape. By filming in frosty blue tones and rapidly crosscutting between the three escapees and the Horseman in hot pursuit, accompanied by bothersome lightning flashes, Burton skillfully builds up tension. When Crane, Katrina, and Masbath finally reach the roof – shown against a turbulent night sky that reflects the thrilling atmosphere – Crane throws a lantern into the mill and it immediately goes up in flames – just like Whale's windmill at the end of *Frankenstein*, to which Burton pays homage in a closely-resembling, though mirror-inverted establishing shot. Only seconds before the building explodes in an impressive special effect, the three manage to save themselves by climbing onto the windmill sails and jumping to the ground. However, since the undead cannot be killed, the Horseman continues his merciless pursuit as Crane, Katrina, and Masbath try to escape into the forest in a carriage. What follows is an action-packed chase scene, involving a life and death fight between Crane and the Horseman on the roof of the moving carriage and featuring extremely fast cuts; fast pans; numerous (medium) close-ups and POV shots that bring the viewer unsettlingly close to the action; dizzyingly tilted, high

and low camera angles as well as menacing music and frequent lightning flashes, which produce a threatening feel.²³¹

Eventually, Crane, Katrina, and Masbath reach the Tree of the Dead, where they are joined by Lady Van Tassel on her horse. She shoots Crane, and it is only thanks to Katrina's book, which he literally wore close to his heart in his vest pocket, that he survives. As the Horseman approaches them, Lady Van Tassel grabs her stepdaughter by the hair and presents her to the Hessian so that he can kill her. At this moment, Crane discovers the Horseman's skull in a pouch tied to Lady Van Tassel's saddle, and they begin to struggle for it. At the last minute, as the Horseman is just about to behead Katrina, Crane, with the help of Masbath, restores the head (and thus his self-governed identity) to the Hessian, who reattaches it to his neck with a crack while thunder claps. In a particularly gory series of medium close-ups, blood vessels and tissue increasingly overgrowing the bone, icy blue eyes bulging, Burton shows the retransformation of the skull back into the Horseman's head, which was inspired by old anatomy books (cf. audio commentary). Before the Hessian on his horse returns to the netherworld, however, he picks up Lady Van Tassel, who regains consciousness just in time for the grand finale: as she realizes where she is and what is happening, a close-up, lit by a lightning flash, shows her terrified face before the camera cuts to a close-up of the Hessian, grinning gloatingly. Her deathly scream, however, is silenced by the Horseman's brutal kiss, blood gushing out of her mouth. With a loud roar, the Headless Horseman on his horse Daredevil and Lady Van Tassel, screaming in agony, finally disappear into the Tree of the Dead, leaving only a trail of blood on the gate-forming roots, from which a hand now mysteriously sticks out. It is in fact Lady Van Tassel's hand, which looks as if it wanted to lure Crane when the index finger on the dying hand slowly begins to move. This is too much for the highly sensitive Crane, and as in almost all agitating incidents before, he faints again.

Sleepy Hollow ends on a positive note, which is also reflected in the now more colorful environment as Crane, Katrina, and Masbath depart. Since the film "had such a dark tone," Burton thought it "appropriate to end it on a more up-beat," "into-a-new-beginning type feeling" (audio commentary). Thus, when the three characters finally arrive in New York, "just in time for the new century," as Crane notes, order has been restored and the nuclear family, or rather Burton's variation on it, faces a bright future. Hence, the film's hitherto dark Gothic tone gives way to a light-hearted, romantic one.

²³¹ The rather comic element of Crane riding a horse backwards was another tribute to the Disney cartoon.

7. Epilogue: The Gothic's Adventures in Film Land

As the previous chapters have shown, the Gothic and the film medium have always shared a particular affinity. On the one hand, in part due to its distinct visual character and its fantastic elements, the Gothic has lent itself perfectly to film as a visual medium par excellence from the beginning, allowing generations of filmmakers to explore and exhibit the medium's continuously evolving repertoire of technical possibilities. On the other hand, the film medium with its enormous and ever growing potential has turned out to be a particularly effective and affective medium for the visualization of the Gothic. In fact, as discussed in detail in chapter 3, the two share certain characteristics: for example, the Gothic often features spectral beings, and film is per se of a spectral or phantasmal nature; both involve an interplay of light and dark or shadowplays; doubles, which are typical members of the Gothic cast, are also naturally produced by the screen; and both frequently involve the return of the dead. All in all, then, the Gothic and film obviously form an ideal match.

In the course of time, the Gothic film, which draws on a signature visual aesthetic that has its roots in the classic Gothic novel and was picked up and developed further by other visual media such as the phantasmagoria and early cinema, has constantly evolved, and it continues to do so, always transforming while adapting to the conditions of the day. As a mode that not only deals with the blurring of lines and the transgression of boundaries, but per se blurs lines and transgresses boundaries all the time, for example, those between different modes and genres, it has thus proved to be indefinable; that is, it refuses to be narrowed down to one concrete definition. The films of Jacques Tourneur, Roger Corman, and Tim Burton (see Part II), in particular, have demonstrated the wide range of different forms the Gothic on screen can take and has taken over time. Tourneur's dark and highly suggestive, somewhat noir-style pictures primarily foreground and produce a heightened level of terror that is evoked first and foremost by sublime shadows, for example, as a means to draw attention to a lurking presence. In Corman's visually excessive and often campy reinventions of Poean Gothic, the Gothic character of the original texts is amplified; not only by borrowing freely from the pool of familiar Gothic ingredients, but also, among other things, by using décor, elaborate camera work, and specific visual techniques, such as widescreen format, to create a claustrophobic and oppressive atmosphere and a sense of foreboding. By his own account preferring the visual as a conveyor of emotions over the verbal, Tim Burton avails himself of dreamy and enchanting imagery, (old-fashioned) special effects, and stylized (horror) elements for his tendentially dark films to create an artificiality that gives his pictures the

desired fairy-tale quality. Burton's range of films alone, spanning various types of modes or genres – such as fantasy, horror, (black) comedy, musical, and animation – shows how difficult it is to narrow “Gothic film” down to one fixed definition. It is for this very reason that I have introduced the Gothic “tag” as a means to describe rather than define Gothic films (see chapter 1). In contrast to a definition, which always involves delimitation, a tag can be affixed to a film along with other tags. As such, it helps to characterize a film without ever being exclusive. The Gothic tag is applicable whenever the following combination of interconnected concepts that underlies Gothic film and its visual aesthetic is discernable in a film along with a number of other conventional Gothic elements: terror is privileged over horror and partly evoked by sublime visual experiences, such as eerily obscure or ominous shadows; supernatural occurrences or effects of the fantastic, which per se often imply a sublime experience, also do their bit in the creation of a mysterious and spine-tingling atmosphere; and the uncanny plays another central role as an unsettling element.

In early 2010, *Alice in Wonderland* was released, yet another contribution to Gothic cinema by Tim Burton, who remains one of today's major proponents of the Gothic film.²³² *Alice in Wonderland*, which is no Gothic film in the popular understanding of the term (for example, it lacks a distinct horror quality), illustrates the applicability and flexibility of the Gothic tag particularly well, and it thus deserves closer inspection. Other than the title suggests, the film is not really an adaptation of Lewis Carroll's famous 1865 novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, but rather a Burtonesque kind of sequel to Carroll's nonsense fantasy adventure story and its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1872). That is to say, while Carroll's dreamy, if often unsettling original works do not have a Gothic quality to them, Burton's film, which bears the signature visual style of its director throughout (cf. chapter 6), begs for the Gothic tag. The story goes as follows: thirteen years after first visiting Wonderland, Alice (Mia Wasikowska), now nineteen years old and about to be married off to an awkward character by the name of Hamish (Leo Bill), returns (or rather escapes) to what in Burton's movie is called “Underland.” Here, she not only meets her former acquaintances – the Mad Hatter (Johnny Depp), the Cheshire Cat (Stephen Fry), the Caterpillar (Alan Rickman), the Dormouse (Barbara Windsor), the White Rabbit (Michael Sheen), the March Hare (Paul Whitehouse), and Tweedledee and Tweedledum (Matt Lucas), among others – but is also asked by the good White Queen (Anne Hathaway) and expected by the others to defeat the Jabberwocky (voiced by Hammer horror icon Christopher Lee), a

²³² Two further Gothic projects by Burton were released in 2012: a remake of his own film *Frankenweenie* (1984; see chapter 6) and an adaptation of the Gothic TV soap opera *Dark Shadows* (1966-71).

dragon-like creature controlled by the tyrannical Red Queen (Helena Bonham Carter), in order to restore her to power.

From the beginning and in line with Burton's other films, *Alice in Wonderland* is a much darker and more sinister text than Carroll's original works, despite its comic elements and moments and its visually excessive, mesmerizing, and often enchanting images that give the film the typically Burtonesque fairy-tale quality. Not only does the location name "Underland" evoke associations of some kind of gloomy underworld, but the journey Burton's Alice experiences is also real, and at times quite a nightmare at that, and not just a dream as in Carroll's novel. That is to say, the young woman really falls into a rabbit hole – the floor of which is covered with Expressionism-inspired geometrically confusing tiles familiar from many of Burton's films (*Vincent*, *Beetlejuice*) – and ends up in a parallel world, where the laws of nature do not apply and magic and supernatural events are nothing out of the ordinary. In Burton's film, the fantastic thus immediately gives way to the marvelous (cf. chapter 1). In the course of Alice's journey, in fact a rite of passage, through an at times typical Gothic landscape featuring a haunted forest, a foggy swamp, and Gothic castles, she is faced with numerous uncanny events and terrors;²³³ for example, she narrowly escapes an attack by the monstrous Bandersnatch, and she is incessantly persecuted by the Red Queen's playing-card soldiers. The most disquieting of all terrors, however, is the knowledge Alice has gained from a prophesy that at some point she will have to fight and slay the Jabberwocky in a mortal combat. This scene, which forms the film's climax, is not only set in an environment that immediately calls to mind Romantic paintings of the sublime with their ruins, turbulent skies, and dead trees (cf. chapter 2.1.) and evokes a strong sense of foreboding and doom, but also presents a truly sublime experience in the form of the awe-inspiring Jabberwocky.

As becomes apparent, Burton's *Alice in Wonderland* clearly calls for the Gothic tag as well as for the tag "fantasy." At the same time, it can also be tagged as "adventure" or "comedy." Furthermore, due to the film's combination of live action and heavy CGI animation, including 3-D effects, with which Burton's film joined in the increasing trend for 3-D movies, the tag "animation" is also applicable. This film thus demonstrates the general usefulness and flexibility of tags as descriptive labels, which have an enriching rather than a limiting effect, particularly well.

Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), and even *Alice in Wonderland* are actually part of an upsurge Gothic cinema has seen in recent years. Since the

²³³ Burton's settings also feature some of his recurring elements, such as the famous Burton tree (familiar as the Tree of the Dead from *Sleepy Hollow*) or the burning windmill (Burton's homage to Whale's *Frankenstein*, featured in *Frankenweenie* and *Sleepy Hollow*, for example).

turn of the millennium and in the United States alone, a vast amount of Gothic motion pictures has been released. To name but a small selection of perhaps some of the more outstanding films, these include: *Shadow of the Vampire* (2000), an intriguing fictionalized account of the making of Murnau's *Nosferatu* (see chapter 2.3.); *The Others* (2001); *From Hell* (2001); *The Ring* (2002), a remake of the Japanese film *Ringu* (1998); *The Grudge* (2004), a remake of the third film (2003) in the Japanese *Ju-on* series; *The Village* (2004); *Secret Window* (2004); *The Skeleton Key* (2005); *The Orphanage* (2007); *Dorian Gray* (2009); and *The Wolfman* (2010), a remake of the 1941 Universal classic. Entire series such as *Harry Potter* (2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010) or *The Twilight Saga* (2008, 2009, 2010) have also enjoyed great success; in fact, further films in both series are scheduled for release within the next few years. The same is also true for the *Underworld* series (2003, 2006, 2009), which revolves around the battle between vampires and werewolves, here called Lycans. *Underworld* is particularly remarkable because its visual aesthetic was clearly influenced by the goth subculture (see chapter 6), which, especially in terms of its signature looks, has played an increasingly influential part with regard to the style of Gothic films ever since its emergence out of the post-punk genre in the early 1980s and is itself witnessing a somewhat "mainstreamed" revival of a special kind in youth culture at the moment.

As different as these films may be, like their Gothic predecessors, many of which were discussed in this thesis, they all adhere to the aforementioned combination of interconnected concepts and draw on (and in some cases expand) the repertoire of Gothic elements, tropes, and visualization techniques and strategies that have been established in the course of the Gothic's evolution, from its beginnings with the Gothic novel in the eighteenth century via early techno-visual entertainment productions to contemporary film traced in this volume. Due to the resulting visual aesthetic, they are instantly recognizable as Gothic films, and as such, they have not only contributed to the constant development of Gothic cinema, but can also be tagged as Gothic, despite their diversity. Once again, then, the expedience of the Gothic tag becomes apparent as it allows to identify films without restricting or reducing them to one fixed category. Since it is likely that the Gothic film will continue to evolve, and it must also be assumed that the lines between the Gothic and other modes and classic film genres will continue to be blurred, and since, furthermore, different types of (genre) films can equally be of a distinct Gothic quality, the Gothic tag appears all the more reasonable and promising due to its great flexibility.

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Personal Information

Date of Birth: April 15, 1980
Place of Origin: Wuppertal, Germany

Education

03/2005 – 04/2011 **PhD in English Literature and Linguistics**, University of Zurich
09/2002 – 12/2002 **Semester abroad** (scholarship), American Studies and Film Studies,
University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, USA
10/1999 – 10/2004 **MA in English and American Studies and Theater, Film, and
Media Studies** (Mag. phil., *with honors*), University of Vienna,
Vienna, Austria
01/1997 – 06/1997 **High-school student exchange** with Partnership International
(formerly Fulbright), Woodside High School, Newport News,
Virginia, USA
08/1990 – 06/1999 **High-school diploma** (Abitur), Staedtisches Gymnasium
Sedanstrasse, Wuppertal, Germany

Teaching Experience

08/2011 – current **Senior Lecturer** (Business/Legal English), ZHAW – School of
Management and Law, Winterthur
08/2011 – current **Lecturer** (English/American Literature and Culture), University of
Berne, Department of English Languages and Literatures
09/2011 – 12/2011 **Lecturer** (English, CPE), Zurich University of Teacher Education
09/2007 – 05/2008 **Lecturer** (American Literature and Culture), University of Zurich,
English Department
03/2007 – 06/2007 **Tutor** (Film Analysis), University of Zurich, English Department
2004 – 08/2011 **English coach for academics** (freelance)

Further Professional Experience

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| 08/2011 – current | Translator/editor , ZHAW – School of Management and Law |
| 02/2009 – 05/2009 | Translator/editor , Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts |
| 05/2008 – 10/2008 | – Business, Department of Business Information Technology |
| 07/2007 – 12/2009 | Proofreader/editor , University of Zurich, Department of Informatics |
| 08/2006 – 12/2006 | Author “Wer kennt Zürich” (board game), Werbeagentur Fuge GdbR, Freiburg i. Br., Germany |
| 03/2006 – 08/2011 | Ad hoc proofreader , University of Zurich, English Department |
| 01/2006 – 09/2006 | Cashier , Orell Füssli – The English Bookshop, Zurich |
| 01/2005 – 04/2005 | Intern Public Relations, Schauspielhaus Zurich |
| 2001 – 08/2011 | Translator/editor (freelance) |

Additional Practical Experience

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 09/2007 – 10/2008 | Co-organizer intl. graduate conference “Authenticity,” University of Berne, Department of English Languages and Literatures |
| 04/2005 – 07/2005 | Assistant Director , Theater am Neumarkt, Zurich |
| 03/2002 – 03/2004 | Director/assistant director , Vienna Theatre Project, Vienna, Austria |

Honors and Awards

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| 06/2008 – 12/2009 | Member of “FilmWissen” (peer-mentoring research group funded by the University of Zurich) |
| 09/2007, 2008, 2009 | SAUTE Travel Award (travel grant for conference participation) |
| 09/2002 – 12/2002 | Joint-Study scholarship , University of Vienna, English Department |
| 04/2002 | Selected participant for a two-day Fulbright Seminar in American Studies, Altenmarkt, Austria |

Memberships

| | |
|-------|---|
| ESSE | European Society for the Study of English |
| SAGW | Swiss Academy of Humanities and Social Sciences |
| SAUTE | Swiss Association of University Teachers of English |
| SANAS | Swiss Association for North American Studies |
| IGA | International Gothic Association |

Languages

| | |
|---------|----------------------------------|
| German | native language |
| English | native-like knowledge |
| French | very good knowledge |
| Latin | qualification in Latin (Latinum) |

A list of publications and conference papers is available on request.